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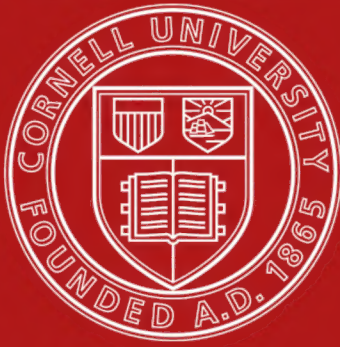


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ITALIAN GARDENS



THE CASCADE, VILLA CICOONA

FROM THE PICTURE IN THE POSSESSION OF
MAJOR ERNEST MAKINS, D.S.O.

[See page 142]

ITALIAN GARDENS

AFTER DRAWINGS BY
GEORGE S. ELGOOD, R.I.
WITH NOTES BY
THE ARTIST

LONGMANS, GREEN AND CO.
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PREFACE

THE cordial reception given to the volume on "Some English Gardens," published in 1904, has encouraged me to hope that a similar volume on Italian gardens may be equally welcome.

When in the year 1881 I paid my first visit to Italy, the subjects that appealed to me more strongly than any others were those to be found in the old pleasure grounds attached for the most part to the great country houses. At that time, I commenced the series of drawings which I have since continued, almost without a break, from year to year. The reproductions of them in this book represent but a tithe of the many drawings I have made during the last quarter of a century. Some of these were unsuitable for reproduction, while many others, especially the earlier sketches, have passed beyond my reach. This may account for the omission of several well-known gardens, and of others, less known, but well worthy of a place in this collection.

Finding how much interest was aroused in the subject of the Italian villas by my drawings of them exhibited from time to time at the Galleries of the Fine Art Society, I began to collect materials for an extensive work on the subject, and filled numerous note-books with jottings, plans and sketches of detail. The present book has, to a great extent, been written with the aid of my original notes, but it was found impossible to include in a work of this class the plans, &c., which would have made clear much that is ambiguous in the text.

I gladly avail myself of this opportunity to express my thanks to the owners of the many delightful gardens here presented, for the very

generous manner in which they have thrown open their villas to me ; also my great indebtedness to those who have so kindly lent me their pictures for reproduction, without whose courtesy this publication would not have been possible ; to Mr. Marcus B. Huish, for his valuable help in getting the pictures together ; and to Mr. A. Llewelyn Roberts, who has rendered me great assistance by his suggestions, both as to the letterpress and in the revision of the proof-sheets.

And lastly, my thanks are due to the several publishers who with so much courtesy have allowed me to make use of quotations from various authors : Messrs. Sampson Low, Marston and Co., for an extract from "Nice and her Neighbours," by the late Dean Hole ; Mr. Elliot Stock, for an extract from "Rome, its Princes, Priests and People," by Fanny Maclaughlin ; and Messrs. J. M. Dent and Co., for an extract from "Florentine Villas," by Mrs. Ross.

G. S. E.

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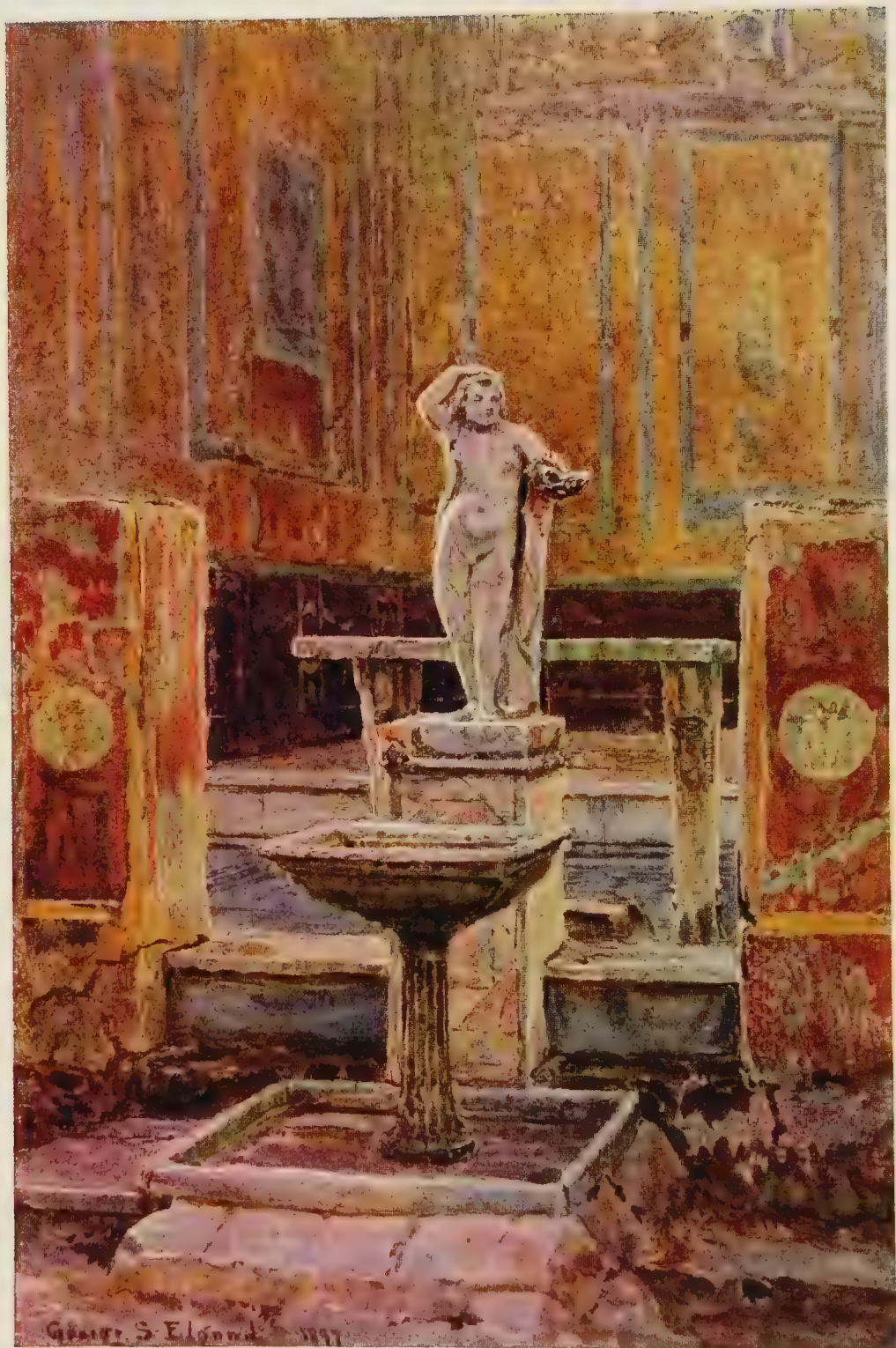
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* Sir Frederick Wigan died in April last

POMPEI



CASA DEL BALCONE PENSILE

IT would be outside the province of this book to attempt to trace the history of gardening from its beginnings. Homer, Solomon, and many other writers of antiquity have left us more or less scant references to the gardens of their day. All these references have a strong similarity; Homer's poetical description of the gardens of Alcinous would fit equally well many a garden in the East even at the present day: "... without the courtyard hard by the door is a great garden, of four plough-gates, and a hedge runs round on either side. And there grow tall trees blossoming, pear-trees and pomegranates, and apple-trees with bright fruit, and sweet figs, and olives in their bloom. . . . There too hath he a fruitful vineyard planted. . . . There, too, skirting the furthest line, are all manner of garden beds, planted trimly, that are perpetually fresh, and therein are two fountains of water, whereof one scatters his streams all about the garden, and the other runs over against it beneath the threshold of the courtyard, and issues by the lofty house, and thence did the townsfolk draw water."

It was from the Greeks that the Romans chiefly learnt the art of gardening, as they learnt many another art. In the austere days of the Republic, when the Roman thought it no disgrace to cultivate his own land, his garden was of the simplest description, being little more in fact than a kitchen-garden, and flowers, if he cultivated them at all, were represented by some half-dozen kinds only. By degrees, however, the simpler *villa rustica*, or farm-house, gave place to the *villa urbana* or *villa pseudo-urbana*. The latter, built purely for pleasure, was not only more commodious than the town house, but in addition gained the advantage

of purer air and beautiful landscape surroundings. The sea-shore and the lower slopes of the Apennines, more especially in the immediate vicinity of Rome, were at an early date occupied by the villas of the wealthy, though these were also to be found in every part, not only of Italy but of the whole Roman Empire.

To this class belong the villas described by the younger Pliny in his Letters. Of these the description of his Tuscan villa is the most complete and interesting. He writes : "My house, although built at the foot of a hill, has a view as if it stood upon the brow of it. . . . Behind it, but at a distance, is the Apennine mountain. . . . In the front of it is a portico, pretty large and of a proportionable length, in which there are several apartments ; and the court is laid out after the manner of the ancients.

" Before the portico is a terrace, adorned with various figures and bounded with an edging of box. Below this is a gravel walk, on each side of which are figures of divers animals cut in box. Round a level plot is a walk bounded by a close hedge of evergreens cut into variety of shapes ; on the other side is a ring, for taking the air on horseback, in the shape of a *circus*, which goes round the box-hedge, that is cut into different shapes, and a row of dwarf trees that are always kept sheared. The whole is encompassed with a wall so screened with box that no part of it can be seen. . . . Almost opposite to the middle of the portico is a summer-house, which surrounds a small court shaded by four plane-trees, in the midst of which a marble fountain gently plays upon those trees and upon the grass-plots under them. . . . In the corner of the portico is a very spacious bed-chamber, facing the dining-room, with windows both to the terrace and to the meadows, and before it a piece of water, which delights at once our ears and eyes, being near and in the view of the front windows, and falling from a considerable height into a marble cistern, where it breaks and foams. . . .

"The disposition of the several parts of the house is extremely delightful, although it equals in no degree the beauty of the hippodrome, which is a large open area set round with plane-trees. . . . The strait boundary of the hippodrome changes its figure at the end into

a semicircle, set round and covered with cypress-trees. The inner circles enjoy the clearest day. They are filled with plenty of roses, and relieve you from the chilliness of the shade with the agreeable warmth of the sun.

“When you arrive at the end of all these winding alleys, you come out into a strait walk ; nay, not into one, but into several, divided, in some places by grass-plots, in others by box-trees, cut into a thousand shapes. At the upper end of the middle space is a couch made of white marble, over which a vine, supported by four small pillars of *Carystrian* marble, forms an arbour. From the couch several pipes spout forth water, as if forced out by the weight of those who lye down. It falls first into a stone cistern, and from thence into a marble bason, and is so managed by pipes underground, that it keeps the bason always full, without ever running over. When I sup here, the more substantial dishes are placed upon the border of the bason, whilst the lesser float in the water, in the shape of little boats and birds. Over against this is a fountain which throws up water. . . . In many places of the walks and alleys are marble seats, disposed at convenient distances ; upon which when you are tired with walking, you may rest yourself with much ease. Near these seats are little fountains. In every part of the hippodrome you hear the murmur of water, conveyed through pipes by the hand of the artificer, in such a manner as best pleased his fancy. This serves to water my greens, sometimes in one part, sometimes in another, and sometimes in all parts at once. . . . You now see the reasons why I prefer my seat in *Tuscany* to those I have at *Tusculum*, *Tibur* and *Præneste* ; the repose I enjoy here is more quiet and undisturbed than anywhere else.”

Something may also be learnt of the lesser gardens of the Romans from the various wall-paintings that have been discovered at Pompei and Herculaneum, as well as of the more permanent adornments of their garden-courts, in the few cases where these have been left *in situ*. These gardens are usually small rectangular enclosures, often surrounded by a colonnade as is the case in the House of the Vettii. This house, though not large, derives its chief interest from its well-preserved frescoes and other ornaments, some of which still remain in position. All round the garden are placed various fountain-basins, oblong or round, raised upon pedestals, into which jets of water played from statuettes standing on

independent pedestals. Other statuettes and terminal figures are set about the garden, and some attempt has been made even to restore the box-bordered beds, which are planted with flowers.

In the small garden of the house of Lucretius we find a niche encrusted with mosaic and shell-work, where stands a Silenus from whose wine-skin the water is issuing. In front of the niche, five marble steps form a miniature cascade, the water from which is conducted along a shallow channel to a circular fountain-basin. All round are placed statuettes, terminal figures, animals, and birds. In this and other gardens Bacchus, with bacchantes and satyrs, figures largely. Occasionally the sculpture is quite good, but more often it shows a marked inferiority, though always interesting and in keeping with its environment.

In these gardens fountains naturally play an important part, and occasionally, as in the *Casa del Balcone Pensile*, the garden is so restricted (being not more than ten feet square) that little room is left for anything besides the *amorino* and its accompanying *tazza*.

Among the wall-paintings at Pompei a few pictures of gardens appear. These show beds of flowers and fruit-trees enclosed with reed-fences, such as are used about Naples to-day, arbours and *pergole* of trellis-work covered with vines and creepers, fountains, statues, pavilions, and aviaries; in every case tame or wild fowl are depicted perching among the trees or strutting in the foreground.

That topiary work was to be found in these small gardens there can be no doubt, for was not the *topiarius* classed among the higher slaves? It was the necessity of keeping shrubs within bounds that first led men to clip trees into various shapes. At no great distance from Pompei, on the outskirts of a small town, more than one of the gardens has just such figures cut in box as those described by Pliny as existing in his own villas. Doubtless the tradition of this adjunct to the gardening art has been handed down through the generations.

With the invasion of the barbarians and the fall of the Empire, the pleasant country life came to an end, and for long centuries the art of gardening was barely kept alive in the cloister and the castle-garth. By slow degrees, however, as civilisation once more began to

assert itself, gardening, together with the other arts, seems to have revived. In the hey-day of the Renaissance, when the demand came from the great nobles for gardens to match their splendid palaces and country houses, the architect turned instinctively for his inspiration to the writings of the younger Pliny and his contemporaries. Many of the new villas were laid out on the ruins of the ancient ones, and the statues and antique sculptures excavated on the spot were frequently used to adorn both the palace and its gardens.

ROMAN VILLAS



THE VILLA BORGHESE

RICHARD LASSELS, in his "Voyage of Italy," writing about the year 1670, says, "Crossing over the Fields, I went to *Burghesis Villa* and garden, which are a little half mile from the Town. This is the greatest Villa that's about *Rome*. For here you have store of walks, both open and close, Fish-Ponds, vast Cages for Birds, thickets of Trees, store of Fountains, a Park of Deer, a world of Fruit-trees, Statues of all sizes, Banquetting places, *Grotta's*, Wetting Sports, and a stately Pallace adorned with so many rare Statues and Pictures, that their names make a Book in Octavo, which I refer you to. As for the Pallace it self, it's compassed on both sides, by a fair semicircle of Statues, which stand before the two doors, like old Penates and Lares. The Wall of the House is overcrusted with a world of *Anticallie*, or old Marble-pieces of Antiquity: As that of *Curtius* spurring into the *Vorago*; That of *Europa* hurried away by *Jupiter*, become a Bull, with a world of such like Fables. Entring into the house, I saw divers Rooms full of curiosities."

We could wish that Lassels had given us, in his quaint language, a more detailed account of these gardens, of whose early state and history we really know remarkably little.

The Villa Borghese or Pinciana, one of the largest, as it is indeed one of the most interesting and varied of the Villas in the vicinity of Rome, lies immediately outside the walls of the City, between the Porta del Popolo and the Porta Pinciana. Originally of quite modest dimensions, it has from time to time absorbed the adjoining *poderi*, including the Villa Giustiniani, and it may be noted that the entrance

gateway of the Villa Borghese outside the Porta del Popolo was originally the entrance to the Villa Giustiniani.

Together with the Pincio, which it adjoins, it is the favourite evening promenade of the Romans, especially since it has become public property; it is also perhaps the best known of all the Villas, as visitors must pass through it in order to reach the Borghese Gallery.

At one time the property of the Altemps family, this villa was much enlarged about the year 1608 by Scipio Caffarelli, who took the name of Borghese, when his uncle Paolo V. gave him the Cardinal's hat. The Borghese family have from time to time enriched the gardens and palace by the addition of a number of statues and other works of antique sculpture. Happily, many of these still remain, though the empty pedestals that encircle some of the minor fountains tell the tale of statues destroyed or carried away to already overcrowded galleries.

The gardens were planted by Domenico Savino di Monte Pulciano, the architectural work being entrusted to the Lombard architect, Girolamo Rainaldi, and the water-works are said to have been designed by Giovanni Fontana.

These grounds are a most fortunate combination of the formal garden and the park. The principal roads and alleys are straight, and as a rule at right angles with each other. At their intersection there is often placed a fountain, a temple, or some other architectural feature to give point and interest. A pleasant shade is given to these roads by avenues of ilex of sturdy growth, gnarled and twisted with age, which originally formed hedges clipped square. According to old prints, some of them were cut in two stages; the lower portion was a square cut hedge about breast high; then came an opening free from leafage and only broken by the stems of the trees, and above this another square mass of foliage: the idea of this arrangement being to get the additional shade provided by a higher hedge, without the disadvantage of shutting out the prospect and the air.

High box hedges, broken at intervals by pedestals carrying vases and statues, also played an important part in the laying out of the gardens, in the higher part of which stands the palazzo, built for



Paolo V. from the designs of Gio. Antonio Vansantio and Flaminio Pontico in the early years of the seventeenth century.

Like the Villa Papa Giulio, this palazzo does not appear to have been built as a dwelling, so much as a place in which to entertain friends and the numerous strangers who flocked to the Court of Rome from all parts of the civilised world. The principal façade was enriched with statues and busts, bas-reliefs and other antiques ; many of which were discovered on the Borghese estates, though only a portion now remains. A feature of the palace is the loggia or portico of five arches, raised above the forecourt and reached by a flight of steps. Above the grey tiled roof with its projecting eaves, rise two turrets or *belvederi* which give a pleasing variety to its outline.

Adjoining the Palazzo, on either side of it, lay the *giardini segreti*. The larger of these gardens contains the Aviary, to which Evelyn refers as "a volary full of curious birds," one of those quaint erections in which the architect's fancy seems to have run riot. Broken pediments, swags and vases of flowers, crowned eagles, ball finials, gaping masks, and pilasters with dragon capitals, are put together with that delightful disregard for law and order which characterises the rococo artist.

These long strips of garden must have been delightful in the old days, with their high walls screened by box or bay, with here and there a little wall fountain, and beds filled with old-fashioned flowers and pot-herbs. At intervals, around and among the beds, were lemon-trees planted in terra-cotta vases, and, in the centre, a dragon with expanded wings gave point to a charming fountain.

After long years of neglect, during which all semblance of garden had been obliterated, the *giardini segreti* have lately been put in order. The walls have been thrown down, the rubbish cleared from the fountains and some rather uninteresting grass plots and walks have been laid out ; it is much to be regretted that some attempt was not made to lay them out once more, according to the original scheme as shown in old plans of the gardens.

Even in its restored and mutilated state the forecourt of the palazzo is still one of the most notable features of the villa. The court is

surrounded by a balustrade with stone seats, the piers between being carved alternately with the crowned eagle and the dragon of the Borghese family. At each of the three openings and at the angles, are placed taller bases, which carry antique draped statues, quiet and dignified, and which seem specially adapted to their position. The side walls are skilfully arranged to suit the slope of the ground, the seats which rise one above the other having a particularly happy effect, and where the principal alley enters the court, the piers on either side have fountain basins attached to them into which the water spurts from grotesque masks.

Before its restoration, not only was the stonework good in design and execution, but the scheme of colour was especially beautiful. The pleasant grey travertine takes kindly to the weather, its open grain being specially favourable to the growth of lichen, moss, and small green things, and where it had received the splash of the fountain, the carved work was almost hidden beneath a mantle of maiden-hair fern and rich green moss. In an evil hour, it fell into the hands of the restoring mason, who re-chiselled all the stone-work—the statues only escaping. Kindly Nature will in time replace the moss and lichen ; she is already doing her best, but the re-chiselling is an irretrievable damage to such work as this. That no restoration was necessary, goes without saying, but some one in authority disliked the exquisite colour, and thought it looked “old and dirty” ; and that is a sufficient reason for restoration in any civilised country.

There is a story current in Rome that the original balustrade was bought by a wealthy American and carried away to his country house in England, and that the Borghese balustrade is a copy. It would be a little difficult to accept this story, except on very good authority ; it may have arisen from the fact that a similar balustrade has long existed in England ; the man who was vandal enough to have removed the original would certainly have preferred a brand new balustrade.

Each of the minor piers formerly carried a vase or great pot containing a lemon tree or evergreen shrub ; while the ilex trees that surround the court were clipped to form a hedge some twenty feet high, with the upper part overhanging ; not an

uncommon feature in Italian gardens, where shade is an important matter.

A few years ago, small square seats or pedestals, carved in high relief with scroll-work, swags and other ornament, existed between each pair of benches, but unfortunately these disappeared at the time of the so-called restoration.

Two fountains, designed by Vansantio, which belong to the original gardens, are still in existence. They lie among the evergreen oaks in the pleasant shady little valley beneath the Casino. From the centre of a large oval cistern rises a fountain of simple but excellent design, basin above basin, with the familiar baluster-shaped support.

These two fountains, apparently of white marble, but now toned and made still more exquisite with lichen, moss and water-weeds, are similar in general design, but the details and proportions are different. The taller of the two is singularly graceful and satisfying. Surrounding them is a circle of stone seats with pedestals for statues. The statues are unhappily things of the past, and the ilex hedges, some twenty feet high, shown in old prints, are grown beyond recognition.

Almost in a line with Vansantio's fountains, but lower down the little valley, was the *lago*, which formerly received the overflow from the various fountains. On the plan made by Felice it is shown as a rectangular piece of water, with a couple of woody islands, no doubt intended as quiet nesting-places for the waterfowl. When the new *lago* by the Temple of Esculapius was made, towards the close of the eighteenth century, the old one was probably filled up by the landscape gardener.

At the back of the palazzo looking northward was another *loggia* or arcaded gallery, open to the cool fresh mountain breezes, and commanding an extensive view of the campagna with the valley of the Tiber, and of the blue Sabine Hills away to the right.

Below lies a rectangular court, overgrown with grass, and surrounded by statues, of various periods and degrees of interest, sarcophagi, and great earthenware wine-jars, picturesquely placed against a background of ancient ilex trees. A circular fountain basin marks the centre of this court, where formerly stood Vansantio's "Fountain of Narcissus."

This is only a part of a much larger enclosure, originally planted with rows of trees, forming a compact *bosco*. At the farther end an interesting *teatro* still exists where openings in the wall, giving a view of park and landscape beyond, have been made the excuse for a quite elaborate architectural enrichment. Opposite to this, a semicircle of statues, hedged round with trees, completes a *teatro* which is still a delightful retreat towards the close of a summer's day.

Another feature which can hardly be passed over without mention, is the great gateway at the end of the private gardens, with its scalloped wall and oval niches for busts. This, like the very much decorated lodge which faces it, is evidently work of the same period as the Aviary.

The principal entrance to the Villa was originally near the Porta Pinciana. This was an arched gateway of travertine with the Borghese arms in the pediment, from which an avenue of elms led to a rustic fountain placed in the wall of the first enclosure, and close to the spot where the "Sea-horse fountain" now stands, which was no doubt removed when the wall between the garden and the park was thrown down. This rock-work fountain was one of the class so much in favour with the seventeenth-century architects, or their patrons. An archway in the wall was surrounded by a deep frame of rock-work, set beneath a classic pediment, a huge grotesque mask encrusted with stalactitic growth being an important feature above the arch. Below, in the shadow of the archway, reposed a river-god, his arm resting on an overturned vessel from which the water gushed out. A jet above the archway threw a transparent sheet of water, half hiding, half revealing the landscape beyond. A *jet d'eau* on each side, with water streaming down the rock-work into a great basin, completed the *tout ensemble*. Our superior twentieth-century taste laughs at these puerile devices, but are we really so far in advance of them?

The "Sea-horse fountain," a bold and effective piece of work attributed to Bernini, occupies a prominent position where four alleys meet. From out the shadow of the great basin issue forth prancing steeds, tossing their shaggy manes and flourishing their absurd tails, and the fountain rejoices in a plentiful supply of water, without which the best planned fountain is apt to look somewhat insipid.



W. H. S. 1850

Not a stone's throw away lies the *Piazza di Siena*, a kind of hippodrome, with continuous seats, or steps, raised one above another, and the running track marked out by tall cypresses, and hedges of box, which according to Percier and Fontaine was laid out at the end of the eighteenth century. Behind the seats are fine groups and masses of stone pines. On a summer's day no more delightful lounge than this can be imagined, the cool long grass, the welcome shade, together with the pleasant fresh smell of the pines, making a quiet resting-place which few can resist.

The plan made by Simon Felice shortly after the gardens were laid out, shows that, in general outline at least, that portion of the gardens immediately surrounding the *palazzo* still remains much as it was originally. But outside a line drawn from the aviary to the little "Temple of Diana" great changes have taken place; the *Ragnaia Grande*, a "wood for hunting thrushes" which appears to have consisted of six or eight rows of trees, planted avenue fashion, and reaching to the boundary wall, has disappeared and the Piazza di Siena occupies a portion of its site. To the earlier period belong two pavilions on either side of the Piazza, as well as the Ostrich house beyond, and the Palazzino with its little terraced garden, near to the *Giardino del Lago*.

To a much later date belongs this *Giardino del Lago*, which as a matter of fact Percier and Fontaine tell us was in process of construction during their stay. Divided from the carriage-way by an iron fence, and pedestals which carry dilapidated statues, mostly of doubtful value, is what was possibly a more private garden. This is partly laid out with straight broad walks—but with trees and shrubs planted to a great extent in haphazard fashion. Among these are some stone seats, and sarcophagi with other ancient sculptures, cages occupied by unhappy looking birds and beasts, and, beyond, a lake reflecting in its not too pellucid surface a kind of temple dedicated to Esculapius. This mixture of the formal and the informal is rarely a success. The best thing in the garden is the view away from over the vineyards and the campagna.

VILLA MEDICI

OF the many villas within the walls of Rome, and they appear to have been almost as numerous as those without the walls, the Villa Medici held a very high position, not only on account of its situation, which was perhaps the finest in Rome, but owing to the great charm of its garden and palace and the important works of art that at one time found a place within its bounds, scattered about its gardens or beneath the shelter of its *loggie*. Of these there still remain sufficient to give to it more than ordinary interest.

Situated beyond the Church of Trinita de' Monti, on the higher part of Mte. Pincio, from earliest times a favourite site, it occupies one of the most agreeable and salubrious positions within the walls of Rome. On this hill, called by the ancients "Collis Hortorum," were situated the famous gardens of Lucullus, the wealthy and luxurious. These gardens were of the utmost beauty and magnificence, and were adorned with many valuable statues and works of art.

A portion of this site, with the Aqua Virgo flowing beneath it, the Villa Medici is supposed to cover. It overlooks that part of the city which was once the *Campus Martius*, towards the Vatican Palace and gardens, St. Peter's, the Janiculum and Vatican Hills, with Mte. Mario to the right. Begun towards the middle of the sixteenth century from designs of Annibale Lippi, for Giovanni Ricci of Mte. Pulciano whom Pope Julius III. made a Cardinal in 1551, it passed shortly afterwards into the hands of Cardinal Ferdinando Medici, son of Cosmo I., who succeeded his brother Francis as third Grand Duke of Tuscany, whom he is credited with having poisoned.



It has been suggested that Michael Angelo designed the garden façade of the *palazzo*, but this is disputed or at least does not appear to be proved. That it is a remarkably successful work and worthy of any master, no one can deny. The cleverness and originality of the decoration of this façade with its playful beauty and delicate grace lift it out of the ordinary, and render it essentially suitable to its garden surroundings. As seen from the garden the effect of the *palazzo*, with its slightly projecting wings, its higher middle portion flanked by turrets and turret balconies with the connecting balustrade, once adorned with statues, as at the Villa Borghese, is faultlessly beautiful.

Noticeable too is the superb *loggia*, with its antique columns of granite and *cippolino* placed so as to command the garden, for it should not be forgotten that the prospect from these garden *loggie* was of great consequence, since they were intended to play such an important part in the daily life. The most essential point in the design is the employment in this façade of precious antique bas-reliefs, which with consummate art break the monotony of the larger wall spaces without unduly cutting them up. Everywhere there is a fulness of detail giving an effect similar to that which is to be seen in the best mosaic work, and all is kept in strict order by the few strong dividing lines of the greater features.

To turn to the garden. The first essential to an ideal garden is the *parterre* spread out immediately beneath the windows of the house displaying the pattern of the flower beds to the best advantage. Beyond this should be some compartments on a larger and broader scale, preparing the way for the wild or comparatively wild grounds beyond. But in the case of the Villa Medici, as so frequently happens, the natural lie of the ground interferes with such an arrangement, and the *parterre* lies in front of the *palazzo* with the simpler garden to the left and the *bosco*, which takes the place of the wild garden, to the right.

Falda has left us two prints of the villa as it appeared in his day, which show that its general lines remain much as they were years ago. The *loggia* opens on to a court with a simple well-designed fountain in its centre. Between the windows, and elsewhere are placed statues,

and in the court there are two great basins of Oriental granite, twenty-four palms long, which were brought from the Baths of Titus. Immediately beyond this is the *parterre*, divided into six main "quarters," each possessing its small central fountain and embroidery of cut box. An obelisk, surrounded by four uncut cypresses, occupies the principal position, where to-day stands the so-called fountain of Venus. The remainder of the garden on this level is divided by high hedges cut in two stages, into sixteen compartments, which seem to have been variously planted with fruit and other trees. To the right, by the side of the *parterre*, runs the great terrace wall, with its architectural treatment of niches, with pilasters and cornice and balustrade above. By a staircase within the wall the somewhat formal *bosco* is reached, through which a pathway leads to the "mount" or *gazebo*, which is ascended by a steep flight of steps and is described by Falda as *Mausoleo cercondato di Cipressi*.

This "mount," beyond which was another garden of flowers and "simples" laid out in geometrical pattern, deserves notice as being one of the few to be found in Italy, where, owing to the fall of the ground, there is generally no object in having them. In England, on the other hand, where the high garden walls made them almost a necessity, they were at one time frequently to be found.

Of all this but little is changed, though the *bosco* of fine old ilex trees with their dark rich foliage and gnarled trunks has grown wilder and more picturesque.

When the Grand Dukes removed the more valuable statues from the Gallery to Florence, the garden to a great extent also was despoiled of all that was best worth removing. The whole group of Niobe and her Children, which occupied a special pavilion at the extremity of the garden; the statue of Cleopatra, which also had a *casino* or pavilion to itself, overhanging the city wall; the bronze Mercury of Giovanni da Bologna, executed for the Grand Duke in 1598, which stood in the fountain at the top of the steps leading to the *loggia*, and a copy of which has recently been placed in its former position, were included with many others in the spoliation.

The fountain in the court near the *palazzo* deserves special note. It is one of those charmingly simple and well-designed fountains every line of which is right. Unfortunately this fountain is usually so hidden in a mass of arum lilies that half its beauty is lost. The fountain of Venus also, in the *parterre* beyond, I have seen so smothered in arums that of the spouting dolphins nothing was visible and little of the Venus herself.

The somewhat severe lines of the box hedges might be felt a little oppressive, were it not for the neighbouring grove of ilex and the fine groups of stone pines which are such a striking feature of the garden.

From the approach terrace, at the side of the *palazzo*, one looks over the soft grey roofs and minor domes and turrets to that dominating feature in the surrounding landscape, the dome of St. Peter's, which nowhere is seen to such advantage.

On the opposite side of the gardens (from the palace) the ground is on a level with the top of the old city walls, and one looks over the Borghese park and the Campagna. At many salient points, in the hedges and elsewhere, stand terminal statues of marble. Where paths cross, the corners are cut off and often hollowed out so as to receive marble benches now all mellowed with age.

Placed at intervals in the gardens are good sarcophagi. Some of these are used as fountain basins, in others China roses are planted. Once scattered in every direction and converted into cisterns and washing vats, and even troughs for swine, they came to be recognised later as works of art, worthy to decorate nobles' gardens.

In the *parterre*, with its five-foot high hedges of box, there is a profusion of flowers, including China roses, pale pink and deep crimson, pansies, pinks, poppies, snapdragons and larkspurs, with here and there an oleander or magnolia, and all along the terrace wall clambering over the statues and niches are various climbing tea-roses, while round the court, between the marble benches, set back against the box hedge, are ranged great pots of red or white azalea.

Formerly the road that now leads to the Pincian Gardens ended at the forecourt of the Villa Medici. This court is enclosed on three sides

by old ilex trees, clipped square. Beneath the deep shade of these, and opposite to the grand portal, is a simple well-proportioned fountain, over which arch the ilex trees, forming a vista with St. Peter's in the distance. This fountain is mentioned by Evelyn as having a jet fifty feet high, but water is not so plentiful now.



VILLA COLONNA

The casual wanderer in Rome, turning out of the modern Via Nazionale into the Via Pilotta, and passing beneath the handsome series of arches with their balustrades that span the street, little suspects that on the steep hill-side to his right lies one of the most interesting and picturesque examples of a town garden in Italy.

These arches connect the principal floor of the Colonna Palace with the lowest terrace of the villa. When first laid out, the whole hill-side was visible from the windows, and the villa appears to have been designed with that intention. But in this, as in many another villa, favoured by the climate, the ilex hedges have grown rather out of hand, and have combined with the cypresses and other trees to form an almost impenetrable screen, which is certainly beautiful enough in itself and makes us the less inclined to resent its presence.

As shown in an engraving by Vasi, who tells us that the garden has been but recently restored and beautified, the first terrace lies immediately under the windows of the palace. It was naturally laid out as the *parterre*, and was divided by broad gravelled walks into three main compartments or "knots," which are filled in with a complicated scroll-work or embroidery of box.

Beyond this *parterre*, and carried across the whole face of the slope, is a terrace wall, which is agreeably broken, opposite the three bridges, by the arched opening for a stairway in the middle, and equidistant on either side of this by fountains in the wall. These fountains are placed within an arched opening, and the water

flows into a low curved basin placed between two rudely carved caryatides, which support a pediment with a curved top. Above the terrace wall is to be seen a steep slope. The central feature of this part of the villa is a double stairway in several flights, which, being arranged in a series of curves, recede and approach one another at each resting-place. This stair leads up to a *frontispizio*, a series of niches framed in with pilasters and entablature, which screens part of the great terrace wall. From the central niche descends a kind of waterfall. All the architectural features are set off by balustrades and statues, slim obelisks, and balls, with many vases containing lemon-trees. One other feature of this part of the garden was the arbour or covered walk that, starting on each side of the stairway, ran the whole length of the slope, and made a pleasant shade in what would otherwise have been a shadeless garden.

The absence of shade may possibly have influenced the changes which were shortly afterward made in this lower garden. Ilex hedges were freely planted all along the slope, bordering the various pathways and the central stair. These, which possibly were only intended in the first instance to form high hedges, have now grown into large trees, so converting all the lower grounds into a shady grove, most pleasant in the early summer, and making the hanging garden on the summit of the hill accessible from the palace even on the warmest days.

In his print Vasi does not hint at the existence of a cascade. Presuming that this omission is not owing to carelessness on his part, and he is usually fairly correct, the cascade, with its accompanying stairways, must have been put in hand very shortly after his print was issued. As it now appears, it certainly adds greatly to the beauty and interest of the garden, and, though not on a grand scale like those at Frascati, for the situation would not permit of it, it possesses a peculiar charm of its own. Starting from the fountain niche above, the water falls into a succession of shallow basins, divided from the stairs on each side by low stepped walls. Conchs are placed upright at the lip of each basin; from these, and probably from other points in the descent, jets of water spurted, filling the



air with coolness and moisture. Much of the architectural detail is lost beneath a veil of rich green moss and water-growth, but all is so delicious in colour, that we could not wish it to be other than it is.

One of the pictures shows the point at which the cascade is interrupted, midway in the descent, by an oval platform, about which the stairway winds. It is surrounded by statues of marble, toned and mellowed by age into delightful harmony with the great overhanging hedges of evergreen oak.

In order to reach the upper or hanging garden, as it may be called, a steep pathway must be climbed which leads to a broad terrace walk, only separated from the main garden by a close clipped screen of evergreen. From this walk, with its low parapet, we see at our feet the busy city with its many domes and towers, and away in the distance the low dark hills beyond the Tiber. An opening in the tall hedge admits to the flower garden, the centre of which is occupied by a fountain-basin, with some beds of tea-roses round it, and the only thing that disturbs the deep reflections is a tiny jet of water. From this fountain broad paths radiate in all directions, with good box borders, a foot or more in breadth and high in proportion, which hold up the beds of rich earth, whose surface is some nine inches above the path. These beds are not too small, and are planted full of good old-fashioned flowers, peonies and poppies, white lilies and Canterbury bells, pinks and lavender, carnations and hollyhocks, with here and there a fruit tree or flowering shrub. At intervals about these box borders are placed earthen pots containing lemon-trees or showy bushes of crimson, white, or yellow azalea.

Beyond the clipped evergreen hedge that closes in the *parterre* towards the south is a wilder garden, with seats placed beneath the shade of stone pine or cypress trees. So secluded indeed is this garden, that it is a little difficult to imagine oneself in the heart of a great city.

Returning once more to the lower terrace, we find at the end, facing the long gallery of the palace, a handsome balustrade with a fringe of antique marble statues; below this are three niches placed between coupled columns of oriental granite. These niches are occupied by statues of three notable members of the great Colonna family; the one

in the middle representing D. Marcantonio Colonna, the great hero in the wars against the Turks; that to the right D. Fabrizio Colonna; and that to the left D. Filippo Colonna. David Salvagni writes of the older Roman families in his interesting book on Rome in the eighteenth century: "The great legendary and historical families of Rome were always the Conti, Caetani, Colonna and Orsini; and of these the Colonna was first in magnificence and popularity. A succession of famous Popes and able warriors had raised the house to which they belonged to the prominent position that was acknowledged as the birth-right of the Colonna princes by all the other new and noble families; and the deeds and daring which brought about this result, the family struggles with the Popes, its partisanship with the Emperor and its adhesion to the Ghibelline faction, have long been matters of history. With the Roman people the Colonna family was always wonderfully popular, and even yet mothers sing their infants to sleep with a nursery ditty which commemorates the mightiness of that mighty house. It runs thus:

"Che possa avere cinque figli maschi,
E tutti quanti di Casa Colonna,
Uno papa, l'altro Cardinale,
Ed uno arcivesco di Colonia,
Ed uno possa avere tanta possanza,
Da Levar la corona al re di Franza,
E l'altro possa aver tanto valore,
Da Levar la corona all'imperatore."

which may be translated:

Who would not have five fine sons
Such as the Colonna own;
One a Pope, and one a Cardinal,
And one Archbishop of Cologne,
And one who could take the crown away
From the King of France, in open fray—
And one who could make the Emperor
Grace from his warlike hand implore? *

Of the many other great gardens which now remain within the city walls, one of the most important is the garden of the Quirinal Palace.

* "Rome, Its Princes, Priests and People." By David Silvagni. Translated by Fanny Maclaughlin. (Elliot Stock. 1885.)

Though the Palazzo Apostolico is in part at least of earlier date, the gardens do not appear to have been laid out until the time of Pope Urban VIII., who, feeling the want of a garden suitable to his state, decided to make one on the rough hill-side to the north of the palace, where the ground was encumbered with the remains of ancient walls. At considerable expense these walls were removed, and the ground was levelled, but the outlying parts were terraced with new and high walls. In connection with the laying out of these gardens the names of Maderna and Ottavio Mascarini are mentioned, but it is not easy at this distance of time to assign the work with any degree of certainty.

The garden on the upper level was laid out largely with straight alleys and many square plots, with low hedges of box or myrtle, enclosing an embroidery of flowers and box-work. To those who do not love the ordered garden this will doubtless seem a little tame ; but variety was obtained by the great diversity of fountains, statuary and other works of ancient art. At the greater walks, avenues of cypress broke across the garden, where also casinos were built at various points, everything being done to make the place worthy of the great Pontiff.

In the foreground of one of Falda's views a quaint device is shown ; this is a bower erected over one of the principal fountains, which takes the form of a cupola of trellis-work, supported on eight pillars, the whole being wreathed in greenery, which was possibly composed of evergreens, though there is no reason why it should not have been of roses.

Not far distant from this was a Mount Parnassus, without which, apparently, no garden could be considered complete. This unfortunately fell into disrepair and its place was taken by a hydraulic organ, which in turn fell on evil days, though its remains are still shown to the curious in the wonderful grotto beneath the great terrace.

The gardens have naturally been a good deal modernised, yet much remains of the ancient setting. In places, the hedges of ilex, box or bay which enclosed the plots have grown to a height of some thirty feet, making courts and alleys delightful in the extreme, though scarcely what the architect intended them to be.

Hawthorne gives a pleasant description of the gardens as they were before they passed out of the hands of the Pope. "They are very

extensive, and laid out in straight avenues, bordered with walls of box, as impervious as if of stone—not less than twenty feet high, and pierced with lofty archways, cut in the living wall. Some of the avenues were overshadowed with trees, the tops of which bent over and joined one another from either side, so as to resemble a side aisle of a Gothic cathedral. Marble sculptures, much weather-stained, and generally broken-nosed, stood along these stately walks; there were many fountains gushing up into the sunshine; we likewise found a rich flower-garden, containing rare specimens of exotic flowers, and gigantic cactuses, and also an aviary, with vultures, doves, and singing birds. We did not see half the garden, but, stiff and formal as its general arrangement is, it is a beautiful place—a delightful, sunny, and serene seclusion.”



1864
J. H. P. 1864

VILLA CORSINI

THE Villa Corsini lies on the slopes of the Janiculum at the rear of the Palazzo Corsini, now the Royal Academy of Science. Purchased by the Government about 1884, the lower part of the grounds was devoted to botanical gardens, the upper being included in the grounds which are attached to the Passeggiata Margherita. Whether this could ever have been considered one of the great architectural gardens it is not easy to say, owing to the fact that the government officials, for the sake of doing something to justify their possession, grubbed up the ancient bay hedges and cut down good trees, planting in their place rows of palms and firs and other inappropriate vegetation.

Of the architectural features and works of art a few rather poor busts and statues only remain, together with the Triton fountain and a stairway with its accompanying cascade. The Villa is now in a nondescript state, at least so far as the part near the *palazzo* is concerned. But what a charming botanical garden could have been created here, had all that was left of the old gardens been used as a background for the formal beds which were intended to receive the botanical specimens! In order to see what can be done with a botanical garden, one should visit Padua, where the old garden has a high circular wall finished with a balustrade, great gateways, urns, and busts. It is laid out with firm stone edgings, not rock work, each plant or family having a division set apart for it. Fountains enliven the principal walks, and, like all fountains in Italy, these are useful as well as ornamental, for from them the gardener fills his cans when the sun gets low.

The Villa Corsini appears to have been a possession of the family of

Riario, from whom it passed to the Corsini family early in the eighteenth century, being purchased by Pope Clement XII. for his nephew Cardinal Neri Corsini.

Cav. Ferdinando Fuga, who was employed to enlarge and improve the palace, probably extended the gardens and built the present cascade with its accompanying stairways. Of the garden as it existed at this time we know little, the accounts of it which come down to us being but meagre.

The Corsini Palace throws out wings gardenwards; these are pleasantly connected by arcades, which carry balustraded terraces above and form spacious courts. Stretching the whole breadth of the palace is a great garden court enclosed by an iron grille with large piers at intervals, which, being decorated with panel work and mouldings, form a striking feature. Above the cornice is a pedestal enriched with delicate scrolls, which carries a handsome terra-cotta urn with fluted body and handles ornamented with masks and foliage.

The lower part of the garden is nearly level and is now laid down with rough grass, broken here and there by beds of rose bushes. An avenue of palms leads to the central feature of this level. This is a bold handsome fountain-basin with low moulded rim, *quatre-foil* in plan. The centre is occupied by two tritons, two grown-up water-babies who sport in the water. These act as supporters to a basket of fruit and flowers, from the centre of which the principal jet of water rises to a height of some forty feet or more, and, falling back, keeps the group in a state of perpetual moisture, which gives them a rich colour like old bronze. These tritons have the peculiarity of possessing, in place of the usual arrangement, two long and sinuous fish-tails apiece, which start from the thighs, and their serpent-like coils appear above the surface of the water or peer through the masses of water-lilies, which cover the basin and bid fair to take entire possession of it.

Large bright blue dragon-flies sport in the sun; green frogs, invisible against the green leaves, jump with a splash into the water when disturbed; and all day long swifts and swallows skim over the surface of the long seedy grass, seeming to find endless supplies of food amidst their beautiful surroundings.



Until quite recently the beauty of this fountain was much enhanced by a tall hedge of bay-trees, which formed a semicircle around it, an opening at the back showing the pathway which leads upwards to the cascade and *bosco* beyond; but this too has been destroyed by the too zealous hand of the Government official. This hedge may have been the last of what was a most interesting feature in the villa, for old drawings made early in the eighteenth century show what was called a *Teatro di verdure*. This was a great semicircular arcade cut in ever-greens; columns, capitals, and bases, all being clipped to bear some resemblance to their architectural counterparts. Towards the palace the wings terminated with three arches to the front, nine arches going to each quarter, the whole being backed by a solid hedge and vaulted over.

Unfortunately these attempts to reproduce architectural features in "greens" are rarely successful and seldom last long; a little neglect and they are past praying for! Between this arcade and the *palazzo*, to the right of the principal *viale*, was the *laberinto*, of which, however, nothing now remains. Whether by this word was meant what we call a labyrinth it is difficult to say, as the older Italian writers use the word sometimes to express a complex pattern in box.

From the Triton fountain the ground commences to slope gently upwards with rough meadow grass on either hand and some beds of shrubs half-lost in the long growth, and a short path brings us to the foot of the cascade. From this point the ground rises more abruptly, giving the architect an opportunity he was not slow to take advantage of. A wide flight of steps leads upwards to a platform or resting-place, which expands right and left, the low parapet walls curving outwards in order to form recesses for stone benches. Here one may rest in the shade of the overhanging trees and watch the play of the fountains at the foot of the cascade.

Continuing upwards the stairs divide so as to enclose the cascade, which consists of half a dozen falls. At the top, within the curving balustrade, is the principal fountain, which throws a jet of water to a considerable height. In this basin a dolphin disports itself, and it was probably from its mouth, or from that of some *amorino* who once bestrode it, that the jet ascended. At each basin in the descent other

jets play back and forth across the cascade, forming a series of water arches. Vases, finials, and rudely sculptured marbled figures are placed at salient points about the cascade and the terrace wall that overhangs it.

The general effect of the cascade and its surroundings is good. The overhanging masses of foliage in which branches of the ilex intermingle with those of huge plane-trees, the rich dark colouring, wherever the moisture reaches, the maidenhair fern swathing the fountain, all add to its charm. The weak point about the cascade, and this marks the decadence of the garden art, is the absence of mouldings from features which certainly cry out for them ; the upper member of the balustrade and of the stepped side walls is cut severely square, with no mouldings whatever, and in many other ways it lacks the refinement found in work of this kind one hundred years earlier.

Close around this architectural feature stands a group of fine old plane-trees, their huge boles heavily swathed in ivy, which it is to be hoped will not ultimately sap their vitality, for they are handsome trees and could not easily be replaced. These planes have been taken possession of by a small colony of jackdaws, who seem to approve of the comparative quiet during the nesting season. Here they are not disturbed by the all-pervading tourist or the exploring antiquary, who has made the old home of these birds on the Colosseum and Palatine much less desirable.

Still farther up the hill and beyond the cascade is a niche with pilasters and pediments, terminating a vista. Within this there stands, upon an antique marble base, a statue of an ancient Roman in toga. The flanking walls of the niche end in obelisk-like finials.

At this point the garden now ends, but twenty years ago it stretched to the summit of the hill, and, in fact, only stopped when Urban VII.'s city wall was reached. The construction of the Passeggiata Margherita, which was opened to the public in 1884, and runs along the summit of the ridge from end to end, from near the Porta S. Pancrazio to the Porta S. Spirito, cut off all the upper part of the gardens, including part of the *bosco*.

One would have felt more grateful to the authorities for thus making public one of the best views in Rome had the work been carried out in a more conservative spirit, for several villas and delightful

gardens were destroyed which with a little ingenuity might have been saved. As it is, we have one more quite uninteresting drive with its meaningless walks that meander through a nondescript park and lead to nowhere. The view towards the Sabine and Alban mountains, across Rome to the ever-changing Campagna, is the redeeming feature. But what is the finest landscape in the world with such a foreground? A handful of *forestieri* go up there for the view, which the guide-books mark with an asterisk, and get away again as soon as they may.

Though the gardens have suffered so much of late years, good trees having been replaced by unhappy-looking fir-trees and palms quite out of character with the place, there still remain fine masses of ilex, some groups of cypress, and vestiges of sweet-bay and box hedges, to show what the grounds have been in the past.

One who wrote of this villa about the middle of the eighteenth century says of Cardinal Neri Corsini: "He made also the magnificent and spacious cortile encircled with many piers, with wrought-iron gates by which you may pass into the first garden divided into four parts by a fountain and very fanciful compartments. . . . Then follow two labyrinths with statues and antique terminals, before you arrive at a magnificent theatre encircled with porticoes and columns ingeniously formed of clipped evergreens, and there are statues and busts and commodious seats, and in the middle there is a broad basin (*peschiera*) with two tritons, which recline upon a rock and which throw up a great spout of living water, the which, falling with a great noise, seems to call the spectator to observe the constant play of it."

"Here in the hot summer days comes a noble company of Cardinals, Prelates, and *litterati* of every rank to listen to the various compositions that they recite before the erudite Accademici Quirini. They sit or recline in groups upon the benches and terraces and under the porticoes. . . ."

Though not included within the city walls until the middle of the seventeenth century, the Janiculum was a favourite site for gardens and villas; several of the palaces which line the Strada della Lungara had gardens stretching away up the hill which, like those of the Corsini, are now much curtailed. The more notable of these were the Villa Corsini, the Villa Lante, Giardino Salviati, and the Villa Barberini. .

This last villa was built by Taddeo Barberini, a nephew of Urban VIII., about 1626, on a portion of the site of the gardens of Nero ; Luigi Arrigucci and Dom. Castelli are said to have been the architects. The plan of the house is simple but the effect good. The hill here is somewhat steep and the gardens, entered through the *cortile*, rise by a series of terraces to an amphitheatre at the top, a series of gentle stairways flanking each successive terrace. In making the excavations many remains of ancient art were discovered. At the time when Percier and Fontaine made their survey, these gardens were in a ruinous state, but they give an interesting plan of them which indicates how successfully even these later architects grappled with the difficulties of the site.

Not far distant, just without the Porta S. Pancrazio, there is another Villa Corsini. The writer before quoted mentions that at this second villa, which he describes as "full of delights," there were, besides five hundred vases of fruit-trees, oranges, lemons, &c., six hundred great pots of flowers ; a fact which shows that the cultivation of flowers was not altogether neglected as we are sometimes disposed to think.



VILLA DI PAPA GIULIO

WHEN engaged on some work in Florence, Vasari tells how word came of the death of Pope Paul III., and that a Conclave was summoned to elect his successor ; he goes on to relate : “ It chanced that going out of the city gate to meet Cardinal Monte, who was passing through on his way to the Conclave, I had no sooner made my bow to that prelate and spoken a few words with him, than he said to me, ‘ I am going to Rome, and shall infallibly be elected Pope ; wherefore, if thou hast anything to desire, hasten to follow me, so soon as the news shall arrive, without waiting any other invitation than that I now give thee, or seeking any further intelligence.’ Nor was this prognostic a vain word. Being at Arezzo during the Carnival of that year, I was making arrangements for certain festivals and maskings, when there came a messenger with the news that the aforesaid Cardinal had become Pope Julius III. Mounting my horse, therefore, without delay, I proceeded to Florence, whence hastened by the Duke, I departed at once for Rome, to be present at the coronation of the new Pontiff, and to make arrangements for the festivities consequent thereon.”

The new Pontiff was as good as his word, and Vasari had constant employment found for him. “ It was myself, for example, with whom originated the first arrangement and plans of the Vigna Julia, which the Pope then caused to be constructed at an incredible cost ; and although the works were executed by others, it was I who made drawings of all the fancies which Pope Julius invented for that place, and which were afterwards examined and corrected by Michelagnolo ; when Jacopo Barozzi da Vignola completed various apartments, halls, and chambers

of the Vigna, with their appropriate ornaments from his designs. The lower Fountain, however, is after my own design, and was executed by Ammannato, who subsequently remained to construct the Loggia, which is above the Fountain. That artist could, nevertheless, not show what he was capable of, nor do anything in its due order in that place, because the Pope was daily taking into his head some new fancy, which had then to be instantly put into execution, under the orders, given daily, of Messer Pier Giovanni Aliotti, Bishop of Forli."

Thus we see that architects, even in those halcyon days, did not sleep on beds of roses.

Percier and Fontaine seem, however, disposed to dispute Vasari's claim. That more architects than one were employed upon the villa there can be no doubt, for the evidence on the spot is quite conclusive.

The villa has somewhat fallen from its ancient splendour: the statues that once adorned it have almost without exception been transferred long since to the Vatican gallery, and the gardens with which it was once beautified have been absorbed into the neighbouring vineyards; yet even now, in spite of long years of neglect, it is one of the most graceful and interesting of the villas in the environs of Rome.

Passing through the vestibule, we reach an open gallery or *loggia* which extends the whole width of the *casino* and opens into the grand *cortile*. This court is enclosed by an architectural screen which is made a pretext for the display of the most versatile and charming scheme of decoration. The Ionic order is adopted as a framework, both pilasters and three-quarter columns being used, within and around which is wrought with much naïveté and grace a scheme of interlacing ribbon-work, garlands and swags of fruit, honeysuckle, and other ornament, with dancing nymphs and fauns, centaurs and mythological subjects, in marble-framed panels.

In order to understand the kind of work to be found here, and at the Villa Pia, it is necessary to compare it with the delicious stucco-work of the ancients, as shown in the tombs on the Via Latina and elsewhere. We then see how closely the best of these cinquecento artists were in touch with the ancient art, and how they had saturated

themselves with the classic ideal so deeply that they could reproduce it in such a manner as to show that they were no mere copyists.

In line with the entrance to the *casino* is a *loggia* or portico open on both sides and raised upon some half-dozen steps ; beyond it is situated what can only be described as a sunk court, for the *loggia* is placed on a level with the third story of the court. This court is semicircular in plan, and curving stairs lead down from the *loggia* to the second floor, which is decorated with river gods and niches for statues. In the centre is an opening surrounded by a marble balustrade. Leaning upon this, you look down into what is perhaps the most fantastic dining-hall ever conceived by man. The pavement beneath your feet is honeycombed with grottoes and subterranean passages, and fountain niches festooned with maidenhair occupy the intervals between the broad pilasters. On one side a large semicircular recess is hollowed out, the panelled roof of which is supported on the heads of *caryatides*. A wide channel is carried along the side of the court and passes round the recess into which the various fountains play. An old print shows these fountains decorated with *amorini* and youthful satyrs, and upon the balustrade above other *amorini* riding sea-monsters. The whole of this lower section of the court, including the pavement, of which only a portion now remains, is constructed of marble.

Facing the *loggia*, on the opposite side of the court, is a second pavilion of the most dainty and fanciful description. It is smaller than the first, and looks into the court on the one side and into the little *giardino segreto* on the other. Raised upon a balustrade, slender columns of delicate veined marble support an entablature, the central opening only being spanned by an arch, on each side of which are busts in circular niches. The old print already mentioned depicts statues standing out against the sky above each corner, and in the place of the present tiled roof a geometrical trellised dome overhung with vines. To what extent the exterior of the villa was decorated in colour it is not easy to tell ; in all probability the whole of it was painted. Several of the grottoes and underground chambers still retain their frescoes, and the semicircular colonnade at the rear of the *casino* is adorned with frescoes by the celebrated Taddeo Zuccherò, who has here given rein to his fancy

in the most playful fashion. The walls are covered with *grotteschi*, and the vaulted ceiling is painted as a trellised bower, wreathed with "roses, jasmine, and various other flowers, interspersed with birds, saytrs, and great numbers of little naked boys, sporting in various ways."



VILLA PIATTI

It is only necessary to glance at Giambattista Nolli's great Plan of Rome, published in 1748, to see, that dovetailed in between the villas of the great Lords and Cardinals were innumerable smaller villas and *vigne*. Those which have escaped the net of the speculative builder are now chiefly to be found in the more open ground beyond the Colosseum, and are of more than passing interest, for they form a valuable link in the development of the art of gardening.

One that is fairly accessible is the little garden of the "Priorato" or Knights of Malta on the Aventine. It is but a few yards square, with a little terrace overhanging the Tiber and looking across to the Ripa Grande, with the coasting-vessels lying at their moorings, and beyond the Trastevere to the dome of St. Peter's and the blue hills behind.

Set back from the river, and enclosed by high walls of greenery, lies the tiny garden laid out with, tall box-edging, and adorned with many pots of oleander, azalea, and lemon. Here and there are simple fountain-basins, and busts and broken statues fill niches in the wall; making a very complete little town garden, much better worth looking at than the absurd keyhole vista that has such an absorbing interest for the average visitor.

The piazza, from which the garden is entered, is surrounded by an ornamental wall embellished with tall obelisks, ball finials, and ornate vases; stone benches are set back against the wall at intervals, and about the gate is a pedimented erection decorated with pilasters and trophies of arms which are a little out of character with the modest garden within. This has evidently formed a kind of forecourt to the small

villa, where carriages and serving-men could wait their masters' pleasure.

It would be interesting to know to what extent the piazzas of Rome were originally merely forecourts to the great palaces. About some there can be little doubt ; the fine fountains which flank the entrance-gate and which bear the arms of the family tell their own story, as in the case of the Piazza Farnese with its splendid pair of fountains which carry the lily of the Farnese as their chief ornament.

One of the most picturesque of these minor gardens, of which there is no lack beyond the walls if you but take the trouble to seek them out, is the Villa Piatti. It lies some short distance outside the walls, in a fold of the Campagna, and away from the beaten track ; so cleverly concealed that few people would suspect its existence. At the side of the rough country lane an archway, covered by a great penthouse roof, admits to both villa and *podere*. The *casino*, half hidden behind a bank of trees, is set back some distance from the road, and it is only on a nearer approach that you discover into what a truly delightful place you have stumbled.

The gardens lie on the side away from the road and occupy a comparatively narrow strip of ground, some hundred yards in width, which runs in a straight line across a shallow valley. The *podere* which closes them in on every side is to a great extent shut off by high hedges of sweet bay.

The flower-garden is no longer laid out in the old style, the box-work *parterre* having been replaced by grass with beds of flowers and flowering shrubs arranged about it, with a few taller trees scattered over the lawn, slim peach and almond trees contrasting pleasantly with the denser foliage of *nespoli*.

At the end of the *parterre* is a slight drop in the level, marked by a wall and short flights of stairs. Beyond that is a great circular plateau enclosed by a low broad-topped wall, upon which pots of lemon, oleander, azalea, and all kinds of flowers are ranged at convenient height. From openings to the right and left, guarded by terminal figures, pleached alleys of bay lead away far into the cultivated land. In the middle of this terrace is an unusually large fountain-basin, or *peschiera* ;



its centre is marked by a great cockle-shell, in which an *amorino* sits contentedly splashing and playing the live-long day amidst the gold-fish. These little unsophisticated fountain-figures are always a delight, and add much to the colour and life of a garden. To this fountain, as evening fell, came the *contadini* to water their cattle, great slow-moving, sleepy-looking creatures. One lad in drab shirt, and knee-breeches made of goat-skins, like some good-looking young satyr, would perchance linger in the twilight till you half expected to see some nymph appear from the fountain to welcome him.

The architectural features of the garden, though well enough planned and eminently well fitted to the lie of the ground, are, like so much of the later *baroque*, poor in detail and sadly deficient in mouldings. But this weakness is to a great extent atoned for by the clever way in which an exceptionally interesting lot of antique marbles have been handled. These are not disposed around the villa as if it were a mere museum, but are used to emphasise the architectural features and salient points of the garden. Sarcophagi, some of which are beautifully sculptured, are used as fountain basins; terminal figures guard the principal alleys and heads of stairways; and many beautiful examples of cinerary urns, simply carved altars and cippi, besides certain busts and statues, have all been used with excellent effect.

At the farther side of the circular plateau the garden falls away sharply with a drop of some fifteen to twenty feet. The great curve of the terrace wall is broken in the centre by a projecting balcony, which overhangs a fountain in the face of the wall beneath. Here four lesser *termes* or *bifrons* are used as supports for the simple wrought-iron railing. Wide stairways of easy gradient lead down from either side of the terrace, and following the curve of the wall meet at the fountain below. What little architectural detail this fountain once possessed is now completely lost beneath a delightful tangle of weeds and ferns, which fortunately no one troubles to clear away, and which presents a spectacle far more beautiful to look at than the usual fashionable rock-garden.

From the balcony you look right over the little valley to a corresponding *belvedere* terrace on the same level, backed by a glorious circle of stone pines. The strip of garden ground between is enclosed by bay

hedges, which open out midway for the introduction of a quite simple fountain. This has a round cistern built of thin red Roman brick ; above it is a plain moulded *tazza* pierced with a dozen holes, from which as many spouts discharge the overflow from the great central jet.

Prato, or meadow, is the name appropriately enough given to the rough grass lawns that in so many instances have usurped the place once occupied by the *parterre* in Italian gardens. In this lower section of the villa the gardener has made some attempt to introduce beds of roses among the grass, but it is an unequal fight, and Nature seems destined to be the conqueror. In spring time these *prati* are bespangled with wild flowers of every hue. Here and on the rough terrace beside the *belvedere* were violets and anemones, poppies, ox-eye daisies and love-in-a-mist, campanula and marigold, scabious and mallow, campion and the scentless mignonette, together with a hundred other lovely weeds forming a veritable "wild-garden" in themselves.

Amongst other things besides flowers to be met with in the long grass were the large emerald-green lizards, as well as the smaller sorts ; great horned beetles ; and not a few snakes of the larger black, as well as of the striped kind, which basked in the warm sun and seemed at times almost loath to move ; yet the *contadini* walk fearlessly, and as often as not bare-foot, among them.

Beneath the *belvedere* is a vaulted grotto or *salle fraîche*, with a wall-fountain that spouts into a marble sarcophagus. On each side of this, stairways wind upward to the much more desirable open-air chamber above, where marble benches invite you to sit in the cool shadow thrown by the great stone pines which encircle it. From this point pleached arbours formerly led, parallel to those on the other side of the little valley ; probably they even joined hands across the vineyard, but only traces of them now exist.

The *casino* is an unpretentious cream-coloured building, with green *persiennes* and low-tiled roof flanked by two dove-cotes. An interesting and unusual feature of the house is the arched gateway which pierces it from front to back, and creates one of those vistas so beloved by our ancestors.

All about the villa, and forming an integral part of the "lay out,"



stone pines are planted in avenues or circles, but always in such a way as to add a picturesque touch to the surroundings. Some are perhaps as old as the villa itself, and with their sombre, bushy heads add greatly to the beauty of the garden.

What a striking feature too are the hedges and alleys of bay, *laurus nobilis* it may well be called, used with such excellent effect throughout this villa. The trees are thirty feet high, and their principal stem is often nine inches in diameter. So closely are the branches interwoven in the long covered walks, that even at midday the sunlight filters but thinly through.

One wonders why this most beautiful tree, such a favourite in years gone by, is passing out of the Italian garden ! Is it that we no longer recognise its superiority to such things as the palm, the acacia, the common "fir-tree," or even the magnolia, all of which are well enough in their way but feeble by comparison with sweet bay, ilex, stone pine, or cypress ? Nowadays apparently we have no use for the bay save to extract essences from its leaf. During the writer's stay at the Villa Piatti, ragged young urchins and their witch-like grandam were busy stripping the leaves, and stowing them in great sacks for the market.

Terminal figures, or *termes*, are such an important feature in this, as in many another Roman garden, that they deserve more than a passing word. Among the Romans, Terminus was the god under whose special protection all boundary stones (*termini*) were placed, and he was supposed to punish any unlawful usurpation of land. In early times his statue was a mere stone or pointed post driven into the ground to mark the division between two properties. The customs connected with these stones carry us back to the days of King Nūma. When a new boundary-stone was set up, it was consecrated in the presence of the people, a sacrifice was offered, and the stone, bedecked with garlands and ribbons, was sprinkled with incense, honey, corn, and wine. Annually on February 23, the last day of the Roman year, a festival was held in honour of the god, who at a somewhat later date was represented with a human head, but without arms or feet, as an intimation that he never moves from the spot where he has been placed.

Among the Greeks the corresponding god was Hermes, who was not

only the god of boundaries but also the god of roads and traffic, and in both these capacities he is represented in a similar manner. Stones, *Hermæ*, were placed along the roads, and especially at cross-roads, where they often had three or four heads. When death occurred sacrifices were offered to him as conductor of the soul of the deceased, and *Hermæ* were placed upon the grave. Many statues exist of other deities, similar in form to and doubtless originating in the same manner as *Hermæ*. Some have a double head and combine the characteristics of the two deities. A mantle is frequently hung over the shoulders, at whose sides there were often projections upon which to hang garlands. Among the wealthy Romans *Hermæ* of all kinds were in great request for the decoration of their houses and villas. It is also stated that they were used as posts for ornamental railings to a garden, in which case they were usually decorated with the busts of philosophers and eminent men. Some of these may be seen at the Vatican and other museums, with the square holes in their shoulders into which the transverse rail was inserted.

The existence of ancient vaulted chambers in the *podere*, attached to the Villa Piatti and now used for the storage of wine and oil, suggests the possibility that many of the antique marbles employed for the decoration of the villa were excavated on the estate. As at Frascati, so in the environs of Rome, many modern villas were built on the ruins of ancient ones.

It is interesting to compare a villa of this simple type with such a princely one as the Villa Pamphilj-Doria, or Belrespiro, as it is sometimes called. The grounds of this villa are of vast extent, being even larger than those of the Villa Borghese, to which they bear a superficial resemblance. It was laid out about the year 1644 by Cardinal D. Camillo Pamphilj, nephew of Pope Innocent X., from the designs of Alessandro Algardi, and lies just without the Porta S. Pancrazio, occupying, it is alleged, the site of the Gardens of the Emperor Galba.

As it exists at the present day, the villa is a pleasant combination of the formal and the picturesque; the more symmetrical arrangement in the immediate vicinity of the *casino* is admirably carried into the wilder part of the park by means of bold avenues of holm-oak and the regular planting of stone pines. The "lay out" of the gardens has been attri-

buted to Le Notre, but on quite insufficient grounds, and there is every reason to suppose that the planning of both the *casino* and the gardens was Algardi's. Unhappily, like the Villa Borghese, the gardens fell at a later period under the blighting influence of the landscape gardener, who made a clean sweep of all the beautiful lower terrace, leaving only some fountains, and portions of the architectural work which are lost amidst a tumble of shrubs and wild growth not at all interesting in itself. The only portions which escaped were the terraces near the *casino*, with the *parterre* and some ilex avenues.

The *casino*, which betrays the influence of the Medici palace, is a charming piece of design, decorated with busts, statues, medallions, and bas-reliefs in a frame-work of the three orders. It is built on the edge of a terrace overhanging the *parterre*, the ground floor being on the lower level. In a print issued by "Jo Jacobi de Rubei," low wings are shown crowning the terrace wall and terminating in octagonal turrets. It would be interesting to know if these were ever built, for the façade seems to require something of the kind.

The *giardino segreto*, partly enclosed by terrace walls and decorated with grottoes and niches for statues, has the most elaborate and extensive *parterre de broderie* to be seen in the vicinity of Rome. A double stair on each side of the "Fontana di Venere" leads from it to the lower level.

On the slope to the right a highly wrought system of fountains and *guiochi d'acque* formerly existed, disposed on either side of a semicircular *teatro*. This took the form of a low wall divided into panels, with bas-reliefs of subjects taken from ancient mythology which were set between small fountain basins, other fountains forming a fringe along the top. At the foot of the wall a channel received the overflowing waters. Above the *teatro* was a fountain, with Neptune and sea-horses set within the curve of a horse-shoe stair that led to the great avenue beyond.

Equidistant from this, on each side, were grottoes and *peschiere* with tritons and syrens. In one of these grottoes a Faun was represented as playing upon a pipe, and in order to give an air of reality an organ was hidden behind it which not only made music for the pipe but also produced an echo, "Wherefore spectators run ecstatically to hear the

melody that is played ; but then at the exit they meet with so many jets of water that few escape a wetting."

Many engravings were made of this villa, and the old artists give us various touches of manners and customs which lend interest to their work. Ladies and gentlemen are to be seen walking hand in hand through the gardens, the lady often provided with a nosegay or carrying the flag-shaped fan then in vogue. Children, who are much in evidence, run about with toy windmills, like those still sold at country fairs, or play with a bird tied at one end of a string, just as they do in Italy to-day, and a maid wheels a very primitive perambulator, chariot shaped with solid wheels. In another picture two men are shown playing a ball-game with long-handled mallets. This can be no other than the ancient game of Pall Mall, or "*giuoco del Palamaglio*," to which an old author refers as having been played in his time at the villa.

VILLAS AT FRASCATI AND
VITERBO



VILLA FALCONIERI

THE steep rough lane, or rather bed of mountain torrent, which skirts the Villa Lancellotti winds upward between terraces of corn and vine and olive to the Villa Falconieri.

The first indication of the villa is a handsome gateway on the left, wrongly attributed to Vignola. This is in a showy, decadent style, and its authorship may be left to the decision of others. Though standing invitingly open, the gateway now leads only to the *podere*. No great distance beyond is reached the *cancello* of the villa, a plain modern gateway. Across a meadow sprinkled with many gay-coloured flowers lies the entrance to the garden.

Leaving the *casino* out of consideration, this gateway is the only remaining architectural feature that possesses any special merit. It is well proportioned, eminently adapted to its position, and was probably designed by Fontana. Flanking an archway, with Ionic pilasters supporting an ornate and somewhat unusual pediment, are lower walls with niches, shell ornament, and grotesque statues, and outside these are piers supporting other statues of buffoons. Scrollwork and ball-ornaments lead off to the general wall level. Crowning the pediment appear richly-carved vases and a seated lion. Over the arch a label is inserted bearing the inscription

HORATIVS FALCONERIVS,

and among the carving appears a falcon *displayed*, the arms of the Falconieri. Rustication is freely used in this gateway, which is carried out in warm travertine stone that has weathered to an exceedingly

pleasant colour. A broad walk leads direct from this gateway to the portico of the *casino*.

Even as far back as the fourteenth century the Popes were in the habit of making Frascati an occasional residence, especially during the warm summer months, but it was not until the sixteenth century that there sprang up the great princely villas of which the Villa Falconieri claims to have been the first. It was erected before 1550 by Monsignor Rufini, but his earlier building, if it still exists, is masked by later additions. In the following century the villa passed to the Falconieri family, and the *casino* was restored and much enlarged for them by Francesco Borromini, who also built the Falconieri Palace in Rome. Borromini is one of those architects of whom it may be said that, though he broke every law laid down by the older architects, he nevertheless fails to make his buildings either impressive or picturesque.

According to Matteo Greuter, the *parterre* occupied the space between the entrance gate and the *casino*, and was laid out with box or myrtle hedges set in geometrical pattern, with various fountains and other centre-pieces. One among these was a circle of seats overshadowed by a great tree, whose spreading branches are trained to form an arbour with a huge boss over the centre. At a farm in Tuscany the writer came across just such a tree as this, which the peasants had amused themselves by training into the form of an umbrella, the constant clipping having created a perfect network of twiggery. Besides the arbour Greuter shows indications of other topiary work about this *parterre*. It is, however, needless to say that this garden has entirely disappeared, though half hidden among the thickets may be found some seats and rude circles of stone which may possibly be the remains of it, though they probably belong to a much later date.

At the rear, the *casino* looks out upon another terrace on a lower level. There is little left to indicate what was the nature of the garden on this terrace. Was it another *parterre*, with arbours and fountains, or a formal *bosco* intersected by long shady alleys? Shade was such an essential matter in connection with these summer retreats that the *bosco* seems to our northern minds to attain almost undue importance. To-day it is a pleasing mixture of orchard and kitchen-garden, with just a sprinkling of

flowers. A vine pergola leads from the gate to a little fountain that overhangs the wall and is presided over by Vertumnus, who, as usual, is represented with a lapful of fruit. On the base of the statue is the punning inscription :

ASPICE VERTUMNUM DANTEM SUA POMA PUELLIS
SUNT MALA QUA CERNIS DETERIORA LATENT. ANNO MDCCXXXI.

Vertumnus being the god of orchards and the husband of Pomona, who doubtless found a place elsewhere in the garden, it may be taken for granted that, whatever arrangement may have been adopted in laying out the garden, fruit-trees played an important part in it, as indeed they usually do in Italy.

The view from this terrace is little inferior to that from the Villa Mondragone. At your feet lies the Villa Taverna nestling among its wood of stone pines, amidst which one giant, the last of his generation, rears himself high above his lesser brethren ; to the left is the Villa Lancellotti, its avenues of dark ilex contrasting pleasantly with the softer grey of the olives ; while high up to the right lies Mondragone, a prominent feature in the landscape, with its great terrace, its fountain, and its detached columns standing out against the grey sky ; and beyond this foreground of villas and farms stretches the ever-changing Campagna with the shadows chasing each other over its broken surface.

An important adjunct to these villas is the reservoir, in which the water, often brought a considerable distance, is collected, and from which it is distributed by a complex system of water-works to the various fountains and *giuochi d'acque*. Sometimes, as at the Villa Conti, this is quite an elaborate architectural feature ; here it is an absurdly plain and unsophisticated piece of work. It lies in the higher part of the villa and is called indifferently by the peasants *il lago* or *il laghetto*. A very modest *lago* this, being only some forty paces long by twenty at its wider end ! The word *peschiera*, so often given to garden pools, would have better described it, for it abounds with gold-fish large and small.

Within a dark belt of cypress lies the little pool, reflecting the tall, silent trees, its still surface at rare intervals disturbed by bird or fish. Its

only architectural feature is the wall of weather-stained masonry that supports one end. This is quite simply decorated with pilasters which carry ball-ornaments. A niche containing some fragment of antiquity marks the foot of the gently sloping stairways that descend on each side.

Richard Voss, the German novelist, has made this villa and especially the *lago* a favourite rendezvous with the more sentimental of his countrymen, who arrive, usually in batches, hot and dusty, conducted by some ragged urchin who has been picked up by the way-side. They are not always quite satisfied with the reality, after reading the novelist's somewhat inflated description of the place, and will indignantly demand to be taken to the great *lago*, thinking there is some conspiracy to defraud them when they are assured there is no other. Yet the little pool is charming enough if only they would take it as it is.

Perched on the hill high above, on the way to Tusculum, is the Villa Rufinella, also built by Monsignor Rufini. It has passed through many vicissitudes, at one time being the property of Prince Lucien Buonaparte, the only one of Napoleon's brothers who had no ambition to wear a crown. He enlarged the villa and amused himself by making a Parnassus on the slope of the hill, over which presided the Apollo now at the Villa Lancellotti. He had the names of all the great poets cut in myrtle, a quaint device, more curious probably than beautiful.



VILLA LANCELOTTI

ADJOINING the Villa Aldobrandini, and sharing with it the same well wooded hill-side, is the Villa Lancellotti. The dividing line between the two villas is the rough mule track which passes by the Capuchin Convent and climbs up the shady road to ancient Tusculum.

What little we can learn of its history is not specially interesting, nor does it help us to arrive at the date when first the villa was laid out.

About the year 1590 the property was acquired by Monsignor Alfonso Visconti ; it was again sold in 1609 to Mario Mattei ; in 1617 it passed to Roberto Primo, a Pisan noble whose daughter carried it to her husband, Silvio Piccolomini, and in his family it remained until about the middle of the nineteenth century, when it was acquired by Principe Massimo-Lancellotti. Which of its earlier owners laid out the villa and built the *casino*, I have been unable to learn. Over an entrance to the villa are inscribed the words, "PETR : PICCOLOMENS : 1730," which help but little to a solution of the question. The *casino*, with its grey-tiled roof and overhanging eaves, is almost severe in its simplicity. The windows are few and wide apart, as is to be expected in a house built purely for the *villeggiatura*. The garden façade is almost level, only a slight break occurring in the centre, where a *loggia* of three arches, entered from the *piano nobile*, is introduced above the entrance doorway. This section of the front is carried above the roof and is finished with a balustrade and statues.

From each end of this front project avenues of evergreen-oak, clipped into compact hedges. These, lying parallel to each other, enclose the pleasure garden, which they shelter and over which they

cast their pleasant shadows. The enclosure is completed by a "water theatre" of the simpler order at the end opposite to the *casino*.

Within this enclosure lies the *parterre*, which consists of six plots of clipped box, some of the beds having flowers, others depending for their effect solely on the rich green of the box and the play of light about it. Of these plots the two principal ones occupy the whole centre of the garden and are composed of two shields of arms and their mantling or frame work, all cut in box about six inches high. The shield to the right bears the arms of the Aldobrandini family, which was connected with the Lancellotti by marriage.

Of such coats of arms, which are frequently to be found in Italian gardens, good examples are to be seen in the Villa Chigi, the Villa Garzoni, and at the Vatican, where four of them are ranged round the central fountain in the private garden. These are the coats of arms of the reigning Pope, the older ones having been destroyed to make place for them.

Instead of terminating abruptly at the ends of the *parterre*, the beds bend away gracefully to right and left in a series of scrolls and curves. Immediately within the straight outer box border, which forms the frame work, low stone pedestals stand at intervals supporting the usual lemon pots. These are rather more ornate than usual, the lower part having acanthus-leaf ornament in low relief, the upper half having festoons of fruit and flowers hung from masks or rosettes with coats of arms between them.

This *parterre* occupies a place midway between the simpler geometrical garden, common enough in England at one time, and the somewhat over-blown *Parterre de Broderie*, which correctly should have no flowers at all.

At the further end of the garden, opposite the *casino*, is the "water theatre," that pleasing combination of terrace-wall and fountain, which is a characteristic feature of the Frascati villas. Nowhere else is it to be found carried to such a pitch of perfection, thanks no doubt, in the first instance, to a plentiful water-supply as well as to the skill of the architects.

This fountain, however, compared with that, for instance, in the

neighbouring villa, is on a very modest scale. Seven niches are arranged in a wide curve with rusticated pilasters between, and these support an entablature with a balustrade above. From the niches gods and goddesses look out over the pleasant garden; the central niche being occupied by an Apollo, while other statues line the balustrade above. Within the curve lies a broad fountain basin, its protecting balustrade reaching from side to side. In the return face of the wall, to right and left, are square-headed portals with broken pediments, from which stairways lead to the terrace above. About this fountain there is little superfluous ornament. The Ionic capitals have the oft-used festoon motive, and the heads of the niches are decorated with the favourite shell ornament, but its chief charm lies in its simple lines and pleasant colour and its background of low-toned ilex.

Of later date and much interest is an extension of the villa beyond the narrow lane on the left of the *casino*. This extension is connected with the older portion by a stone bridge, which leads to more alleys shaded by avenues of ilex; but the principal feature is an amphitheatre hollowed out of the hill-side and sheltering another *parterre*. At the top of the grassy bank, that encircles it, runs a stilted ilex hedge, left open below so as not to shut out the view from pedestrians who wish to take advantage of the shade. Below this, and parallel with it, is a line of evergreens cut into fanciful shapes, "balls and cheeses" predominating. Within this amphitheatre lies a second *parterre* with repeating scroll-work, somewhat of the nature of our carpet bedding. This has for its central feature a large basin, or *peschiera* as the Italians call it, surrounded by a balustrade in eight short sections, in which openings are left for busts; from the centre rises a pedestal carrying a fountain figure.

VILLA MONDRAGONE

THE Villa Borghese in Mondragone, or as it is commonly called the Villa Mondragone, lies back some little distance from the town of Frascati, above the road to Monte Porzio. It occupies a commanding position on one of the numerous spurs which descend from Tusculum and lose themselves in the woody slopes below.

The villa was formerly approached direct from the main road by way of the beautiful old cypress avenue that climbed the steep hill to the palace from below the great overhanging terrace. This road has, however, long been discarded in favour of a more gentle ascent, which passes in front of the Villa Taverna and approaches the Villa Mondragone through a long avenue of ilex-trees which stretches across the fields and olive yards.

The *palazzo* is of great size, approached only by that of the Villa d'Este. It was commenced by Martino Lunghi the elder for Cardinal Marco Sitico de' Conte Altemps, nephew of Pope Pius IV., whose intention it was to erect a villa more sumptuous than any then existing, but who did not live to see the completion of his darling project.

After his death it was taken in hand by Gregory XIII., who, with his court, frequently made this his summer retreat. Still later, that indefatigable builder Cardinal Scipio Borghese added largely to the *palazzo*, and did much to beautify the gardens.

Among the many architects who had a hand in the building scheme, it is a little difficult to assign to each his special share. Martino Lunghi, Flaminio Ponzio, Giovanni Vasanzio, Giov. Fontana, Carlo Rainaldi, and even the great Vignola himself are mentioned in connection with it



by the old writers. The great terrace, with the Dragon fountain which overlooks the campagna, and that other fountain or *teatro d'acqua* in the private gardens, are undoubtedly the work of Giovanni Fontana, whose hand is recognised in more than one of the neighbouring villas; while the laying out and planting of the villa can with equal certainty be assigned to Carlo Rainaldi.

The great *cortile*, which is entered by an archway beneath the building, measures some hundred paces each way. Round three sides of this the *palazzo* is built, the fourth side being formed by the high wall of the garden.

The *giardino segreto* was formerly laid out with a number of simple but interesting box-bordered plats of a not too intricate pattern. Among these were placed fountains large and small. The lower part of the enclosing wall was masked by hedges of sweet bay or possibly by espaliers of lemon, the upper section containing a number of oval niches for busts, and the coping above having ornaments at frequent intervals.

Owing to the fact that the *palazzo* is now used as a college for boys, and that this enclosure has for some years served as a playground, it is hardly necessary to say that the *parterre* and its accompanying fountains have completely disappeared; but the charming *teatro d'acqua* which terminates the garden is still in a very fair state of preservation.

This fountain, designed as I have already mentioned by Giovanni Fontana, is raised upon a terrace about ten feet above the level of the *parterre*. Up to this a double stairway leads, with handsome balustrades and decorated until quite recently with beautiful fountain *tazze* above the piers.

The terrace has on three sides an architectural screen, with a broad semicircular recess at the rear. This, in many respects, is similar to the one at the Villa Lancellotti, having niches for statues placed between rusticated pilasters. The niches, from which the statues have disappeared, have an elaborate background of stucco-work and mosaic, which is an attempt to represent in perspective a gallery or deep recess, the panelled sides being ornamented with low reliefs in which strange water-beasts play an important part. High up in the central niche, festooned with a

rich damp growth of moss and fern, is a fountain mask from which the water flows into an oval basin beneath.

Within the broad recess is a half-moon shaped cistern, which has a very beautiful balustrade, with a small fountain *tazza* above each pier. This cistern, unlike the one at the Villa Lancellotti, is completely detached from the terrace wall, so that there is a free passage all around it.

Beneath the grass and weeds that to-day carpet the terrace is a pavement of vari-coloured marbles. The face of the terrace was formerly encrusted with mosaic in which the Borghese dragon was conspicuous, traces of which, as well as of the mosaic that lines the steps, still remain. Besides the statues that once adorned the niches, many others crowned the parapet above the *teatro*, and in a niche at the foot of the stairway stood a figure of Pan playing upon his pipes.

Thanks to the masonry having been built almost entirely of the good warm local stone, the weather has not played the havoc which has been wrought with similar work at Tivoli, where stucco has been used in the most reckless way, even among the fountains.

Even to-day, though we cannot but regret the absence of the many statues and busts, and though we miss the sparkle of the numerous fountains, the Villa Mondragone still remains one of the best examples of garden architecture in Italy.

Evelyn writes of this villa, to which he appears to have paid a hurried visit in 1645 :

“We went hence to another house and garden not far distant, on the side of a hill called Mondragone, finish’d by Cardl. Scipio Borghese, an ample and kingly edifice. It has a very long galerie, and at the end a theater for pastimes, spacious courts, rare grotts, vineyards, olive grounds, groves and solitudes. The aire is so fresh and sweete, as few parts of Italy exceed it ; nor is it inferior to any palace in the cittie itselfe for statues, pictures, and furniture ; but it growing late we could not take such particular notice of these things as they deserv’d.”

Before we quit this most fascinating spot, one other feature must be noticed. On the side of the *palazzo* towards Rome stretches a wide terrace, the principal ornament of which is the Dragon fountain of our

picture ; a beautiful piece of work, well proportioned and dignified. The principal *tazza* is supported by the four great winged dragons from which the fountain and the villa derive their name, and the upper vase is supported by the Borghese eagle, but on a smaller scale. Surrounding the terrace is a balustrade of stone, and at each end are tall Tuscan columns, two of which act as chimneys to the vaulted kitchens beneath. The balustrade seems to have been made for the peacocks which perch upon it and spread their glorious tails in the sunlight.

In front of this terrace a wonderful panorama is spread out. Looking over the dark spires of cypress and the deep green of ilex in the avenues below, the eye ranges over the fields of silvery olive and across the ever changing Campagna, with its shifting lights and shadows, to the grey Sabine hills and the distant shimmering sea.

VILLA ALDOBRANDINI

FROM the end of the sixteenth century onwards especially favourable conditions prevailed in the neighbourhood of Rome for the production of great gardens. The country was gradually settling down after the petty wars that had kept the peninsula for so many years in a ferment. Money appeared to be plentiful ; furthermore there was at this time no lack of architects and sculptors who were prepared to undertake work on any scale, however grand.

Not the least skilled amongst these architects was Giacomo della Porta, a native of Milan. He was perhaps the greatest of the architects who followed Vignola, and after the death of Michael Angelo he had been entrusted, in conjunction with Domenico Fontana, with the completion of the dome of St. Peter's. It would be too long a story to give a list of his works, of which the Villa Aldobrandini was the last.

Here he seems to have had the fullest scope for his talents, and to have used them to excellent purpose. The unusual handling of the *baroque casino* itself, with its gable corners and stilted roof-gable, surprises rather than satisfies, and we recognise that in the building of this *casino* della Porta has shaken himself free from the usual laws that govern the architect, and has allowed himself a liberty which he would not have taken with more serious work.

The main lines of the villa, the arrangement of the mighty terraces and stairways, present a splendid example of the more powerful style of that time, the work being extremely well carried out under della Porta's supervision by Orazio Olivieri and Giovanni Fontana, who are here seen



at their best in work of a lighter vein, which forms a pleasing contrast to the more robust style of della Porta.

The hill side, from the lowest terrace to the summit, has been ornamented with a great variety of fountains, large and small, including a magnificent cascade, ending in a *théâtre d'eau*. Immediately behind the *casino*, and only separated from it by the width of a terrace, is this *théâtre*, on lines similar to those at the Villa Lancellotti and the Villa Mondragone. But this one is much more highly decorated, and the wings, extending some forty paces on either side, are a more important feature; the hemicycle, though larger, has only five principal niches, below which are five circular basins connected with each other by a channel.

An engraving of the *théâtre d'eau*, made by Barrière about 1647, who also gives a short description of its principal features, shows how few changes have been made since his day. In the central niche he shows us a group of Atlas bearing the world upon his shoulders with Hercules about to relieve him of his burden. From the globe innumerable tiny jets of water issue and fall down in finest rain.

On each side of this are niches which contain a detached fountain-basin supported by tritons, and all around, in smaller niches, stand "nymphs, Neptune, and other marine gods." Beyond these are two other niches with a background of stalactite-work; the one to the left has a seated Cyclops, who "discourses most excellent music" upon the pan-pipes. In the fellow niche to the right is a Centaur who blows a horn or bucina, "the sound of which may be heard four miles away." Between the principal niches are placed statues within smaller square-headed niches.

The entablature, which has a long Latin inscription relative to the founder and his villa, is supported by Ionic pilasters, except where these are replaced by figures, male and female, among which are to be seen some curious water-creatures, like those to be found at the Villa d'Este, furnished with two tails so twisted around each other that they resemble certain long sea-shells.

Above the cornice is a handsome balustrade with statues over each pilaster. These unhappily are things of the past, their places having been taken by vases containing aloes.

Within the wings are vaulted chambers. A porch or ante-chamber on the left side gives entrance to the chapel of S. Sebastian, the patron saint of the house of Aldobrandini ; on the right, in a similar chamber, is " a miracle of human ingenuity, where the Muses and Apollo in life-like attitudes are found on Mt. Parnassus, executed with such art that they seem to live and breathe." Wind, generated by some hidden device, causes the instruments with which Apollo and the Muses are provided to sound, and " produces the sweetest harmony from the trumpets, flutes, and horns, without the intervention of any human agency."

Appropriately enough, the walls were decorated by Domenichino with a series of paintings of subjects taken from the myths of Apollo ; but the frescoes, having suffered a good deal from the damp, were removed to the Palazzo Borghese in Rome.

The vaulting is painted so as to represent an open trellis-work roof, with vines trailing over it, and birds in great variety sitting among the branches : a favourite device with the old artists, but not often used nowadays, though occasionally it is to be met with in some unsophisticated little wine-shop or *trattoria*.

To return to the fountain-theatre. Above this, and evidently designed to be seen to advantage from the *loggie* of the palace, is the cascade, which, with its accompanying stairways, leads the eye upward to a couple of detached columns. These originally had fountains at their summits, and the spent water made its descent by way of a spiral channel which wound round and round the column. The cascade itself was bordered by fountains from top to bottom, some of which were concealed ; for hidden at the edge of each step were tiny nozzles, ingeniously designed to sprinkle the unwary stranger.

Still higher up the hill-side were other fountains, with channels connecting them and arranged at different angles in order to suit the slope. One of these fountains, now fallen into a state of considerable disrepair, but still picturesque, mellowed with age, and mossy, is shown in one of Falda's prints. The full force of water comes down over a jumble of rocks between two tall niches containing rustic figures, at whose feet water also issues forth. Outside these niches are flanking

walls, built with a double curve like a huge console, behind which a flight of stairs descends horse-shoe fashion. Within the hollow thus formed lies a broad basin, the triple curve of its rim corresponding with the three streams. All the architectural features are encrusted with rude mosaic and *sgraffito*, scroll-work and coats of arms. At the foot of the stairs are two fluted *tazze*, above the centre of which is suspended the Aldobrandini star, from which jets of water spurt. Here, too, the *giuochi d'acque* are much in evidence, *zampille* rising from the mosaic pavement and from the steps. Youths who have ventured to climb the treacherous stair fly precipitately, losing their hats and sometimes falling headlong in their efforts to escape.

Evelyn, who is often singularly reticent about the Italian villas, describes much more fully than usual this one, which seems to have been looked on as a kind of show place in his day. He writes: "5 May. We tooke coach, and went 15 miles out of the Cittie to Frascati, formerly Tusculanum, a villa of Card. Aldobrandini, built for a country-house, but surpassing, in my opinion, the most delicious places I ever beheld for its situation, elegance, plentifull water, groves, ascents, and prospects. Just behind the palace (w^{ch} is of excellent architecture) in the center of y^e inclosure rises an high hill or mountaine all over clad with tall wood, and so form'd by nature as if it had been cut out by art, from the sum'it whereof falls a cascade, seeming rather a greate river than a streame precipitating into a large theater of water, representing an exact and perfect rainebow when the sun shines out. Under this is made an artificiall grott, wherein are curious rocks, hydraulic organs, and all sorts of singing birds moving and chirping by force of the water, with severall other pageants and surprising inventions. In the center of one of these roomes rises a coper ball that continually daunces about 3 foote above the pavement by virtue of a wind conveyed secretely to a hole beneath it; with many other devices to wett the unwary spectators, so that one can hardly step without wetting to the skin. In one of these theaters of water is an Atlas spouting up the streame to a very great height; and another monster makes a terrible roaring with an horn; but above all, the representation of a storm is most naturall, with such fury of raine, wind, and thunder, as one would imagine ones self in some extreame tempest.

The garden has excellent walks and shady groves, abundance of rare fruit, oranges, lemons, &c., and the goodly prospect of Rome, above all description, so as I do not wonder that Cicero and others have celebrated this place with such encomiums. The palace is indeed built more like a cabinet than anything compos'd of stone and mortar; it has in the middle a hall furnish'd with excellent marbles and rare pictures, especially those of Gioseppi d'Arpino; the moveables are princely and rich. This was the last piece of architecture finish'd by Giacomo de la Porta, who built it for Pietro Card^l. Aldobrandini in the time of Clement VIII. . . ."

Upon the palace level we pass through a beautiful grove of ancient plane trees, planted symmetrically with the boughs trained into a continuous roof overhead, whose deep shadow enhances the delicate colouring of the gnarled trunks. Beyond the grove lies the private garden, well screened on every side by tall trees; even the view over the Campagna has been excluded for the sake of shelter, though this was not always so.

A pergola wreathed in roses and other climbing plants leads from the entrance wicket to the great central basin with its lovely boat-fountain, the "Fontana della Navicella," where gold-fish sport among the water-lilies and rejoice in the cool limpid water. Originally this fountain stood within a semicircular recess at the end of the main path and was backed by a *boschetto*. In it, as in the other boat-fountains, there is no attempt slavishly to reproduce a vessel of any sort, the idea merely is taken by the architect-sculptor, who succeeds, as only the old artist could, in producing from his own fancy something infinitely satisfying. The curving and gracious lines of the boat lead upwards at each end to a figure-head, which, Janus-like, has two faces, and is large in proportion to the body of the boat. Water-stained and mossy, the colour is as satisfactory as the form, and only requires the ever-varying reflections to make a most exquisite *tout ensemble*.

All around are beds planted with good old-fashioned and harmonious flowers. No begonias, cannas, lobelia cardinalis, or other atrocities, with their vicious colouring, are here, but simple Madonna lilies, sweet-williams, larkspur, snapdragon, carnation, lavender, hollyhocks, and many another old garden favourite, and last, but not least, roses of



every tint—the dear old China-rose, pink and crimson, having its due place.

When first laid out, this truly delightful garden was divided into four rectangular plots, which were further subdivided into beds of fairly simple pattern, edged with box or myrtle, among which the arms of the family occupy a prominent place. From this garden, stairs led to a lower terrace, now grassed over, but, according to an old plan, this was another box-garden laid out in equally simple fashion.

Yet another delightful little garden is entered from the grove of plane-trees. It is planted irregularly with fruit-trees and flowering shrubs, and is rendered specially charming by some beds of delicate tea-roses which rejoice in the pleasant shade cast by a giant stone pine. At the edge of the garden, and overhanging the terrace wall, is another fantastic boat-fountain, “*Fontana della Barchetta*,” but of quite different design from the one in the *parterre*. Placed between two piers is an oval basin, some ten to fifteen feet in length, which overhangs a grotto and fountain on the lower level. Floating, or seeming to float, in this basin is a *barchetta*, the sides of which are panelled and decorated with the Aldobrandini star.

In the midst of this is a spirited group of two *amorini* astride on dolphins; what they are doing in this *galère* it is no concern of ours to inquire so long as they look picturesque and help the composition.

To-day a solitary jet of water rises between them, and falling back keeps the group and all around in a state of perpetual moisture, which not only has the effect of making the stone-work a most exquisite colour, but has encouraged a marvellous growth of yellow mimulus, converting the fountain into a veritable water-garden. In one of his prints Falda shows a variation in this fountain; the two flanking vases being replaced by great convoluted shells, in which playful youngsters are seated, who hold conchs to their mouths through which they blow water over the central group of *amorini*, who return the compliment.

On the opposite side of the palace is the companion fountain, backed by a grove of ilex on a lower level, which is shown in one of the accompanying pictures.

VILLA CONTI

OF all the hills surrounding the city of Rome those in the neighbourhood of Frascati are the most accessible, and possess the most delicious air. The advantages of this site were recognised at an early period, and the hill-sides were covered with villas, conspicuous amongst which were the pleasant country houses of Lucullus and Cicero, supposed to have been built upon the ground now occupied by the Villas Conti, Aldobrandini, Muti, and Montalto. The exquisite air, the abundance and purity of the water, the charm of the situation, all combined to lead the nobility of Rome to build on this spot their beautiful palaces with the accompanying magnificent gardens. To this day it is at Frascati, at Marino, or at Albano that the Romans are in the habit of spending the autumn season, in order to escape from the vitiated atmosphere of the city, and to breathe the pure air of the mountains.

On the outskirts of Frascati, to the right of the high road that leads to Marino and Rocca di Papa, is the entrance to the Villa Conti; a villa that appears to have suffered less from the innovations of fashion or the devastating hand of Time than perhaps any other.

The principal alterations took place during the first hundred years of its existence; since then it has remained almost unchanged. This may be seen by reference to the drawings and bird's-eye views which were made by Falda, Matteo Greuter, Blaeu, and Rossi during the first half of the seventeenth century. These show the palace with the fountain and projecting terrace in front of it, the cascade or *cascatella*, and the great fountain-reservoir as they are now. But the beautiful series of stairways on a line with the palace had yet to be built.



The ground between the present carriage way and the foot of the cascade, now occupied by *boschetti* of ilex, then sloped steeply and was only slightly terraced. The gardens were laid out in rectangular plots with fountains, statues, and terminal figures; while in the centre of the upper section was a circular arbour or *cabinet*, which probably sheltered a fountain, a device commonly used by the older gardeners. At the foot of the cascade were two shallow terraces protected by balustrades, and all seems to have been of the simplest order, as was usual in the earlier gardens.

Shortly afterwards, however, Domenico Fontana, a brother of Giovanni, appears upon the scene. At his suggestion the ground was excavated and brought up to a level with the first floor, the *piano nobile*, at the rear of the palace. The terrace wall, with its accompanying niches and fountains, was built below the cascade, and probably to the same period belongs the magnificent series of stairways arranged to mask the great terrace wall at the lower side. One cannot but experience a feeling of regret at the destruction of the old *parterre*, especially as nothing of the kind seems to have been provided in the later arrangement.

Though the grounds were now considerably enlarged, the newly levelled portion was chiefly given up to a wood or *bosco* laid out with broad straight drives. As in many another villa, this may originally have been arranged with plots, surrounded by cut ilex hedges; but the trees have far outgrown the original intention, and are now so ancient and venerable that all appearance of formality has departed. The grey-green branches meet overhead, casting a grateful shade over the moss-grown walks. At the intersection of the chief pathways are placed circular pedestal fountains, of delightful design and equally charming colour, whose jets play high up among the branches, and one of which still bears the inscription, GREG : XIII PONT : MAX :

The central alley leads to a wide *piazza* among the trees, the farther side of which is entirely occupied by the so-called *Girandola*, a series of fountain niches which line a terrace wall some hundred yards in length. A channel six feet wide, into which the fountains discharge, runs at its foot. In the middle this widens out into a large semicircular

basin about a rockwork centre-piece, with minor fountains surrounding a great central jet. Above the cornice runs a long line of stone vases, now filled with aloes and other plants, each of which formerly was a fountain adding its quota to the general effect. Doubtless when all the fountains were in working order, and the air was filled with the spray of falling water, it well deserved its high-sounding name. It is seen at its best in the early morning, when half hidden by the mist-wreaths that roll up from the Campagna, only to be dispersed later as the sun asserts his power.

Though the *Girandola* is attributed to Domenico Fontana, it cannot for one moment compare with similar work by his brother Giovanni in the neighbouring villas. In fact, both in conception and detail it is so poor that one is tempted to place it a hundred years later; yet so unequal is the work produced by contemporary artists, that it is more than possible for it to be of the same date as the grand stairways in the lower part of the villa, which are a very different stamp of work.

Above the *Girandola* is the cascade, whose principal interest lies in its peculiar sinuous outline, and in the sloping stone ledges which connect its series of oval basins. Flights of moss-grown steps follow the curving lines of these basins to a *belvedere*, which dominates the cascade, and beneath which a stream of water gushes from the mouth of a huge grotesque mask, almost hidden beneath a wealth of maidenhair which takes complete possession of the damp and open-grained stone.

The ground on each side of the cascade—in fact, the whole summit of the hill—is clothed with a dense growth of evergreen-oak. A narrow passage only is left for the cascade, high above which the trees tower. Beyond, the trees open out, and encircle the great fountain, in its present state perhaps the most beautiful feature in all these Frascati villas. Two pictures are devoted to this fountain, but it is on so large a scale that portions only of it can be satisfactorily shown.

Its total width is about thirty-five yards, and it may roughly be described as having four great lobes or semicircles, the segments of which are united by two short angle-pieces. It is surrounded by a richly carved balustrade, raised on a wide step; facing the water, each of



the numerous piers carries a fountain-mask, in carving which the artist has shown endless invention, and above each pier shallow moulded fountain basins are provided.

The centre-piece is a six-foot basin raised upon a foundation of rock-work, which appears to be of much later date than its surroundings. It throws a powerful jet of water twenty to twenty-five feet above the basin, though during a storm the jet will occasionally rise to double this height.

The mouldings and other detail of the stone-work, as well as the general proportions of this fountain, are eminently satisfactory, and from a pictorial point of view its beauty is enhanced not a little by the charming growth of every sort of limestone-loving weed too numerous to mention.

Falda's engraving of the fountain shows it enclosed by a tall hedge of clipped evergreen, above which the natural trees appear. He also shows a much larger centre-piece than the present one, and this is supplemented by four other jets rising from the surface of the water. All the lesser fountains also are represented as spurting so vigorously that the gentlemen who lean in negligent attitudes upon the balustrade in close proximity would in a short time certainly be drenched. Surrounding the broad step is shown a channel to carry off the water that splashed over; a very necessary adjunct, for such tiny basins could not be expected to catch more than a tithe of the falling water. A similar arrangement was in use at the Villa Mondragone, where a gust of wind frequently carried the water quite clear of the basin.

The *palazzo* lies between two terraces, and is entered from either level, in this point resembling many of the Frascati villas. It is an interesting, picturesque, and rambling old house, with thick walls, grey-tiled roof, and projecting eaves; in all likelihood older than the gardens, and certainly much older than the grand stairways, and its situation is one which could not be improved.

The elaborate series of stairways that lead to the principal terrace and the *boschetti* is unique, and forms the striking feature of the villa. These stairways, of which there are no fewer than four, which are set at various angles, with a double *pente douce* in the middle, stretch from end to end

of a terrace some 200 yards in length. The staircases are balustraded and decorated with fluted balls and vases; the latter, though now used for aloes, doubtless at one time were fountains. The spaces between the various flights are filled with roses of all sorts and other flowers, the effect of which, in conjunction with the warm grey stone, is pleasing in the extreme.

This villa served as a retreat to Pope Gregory XV., of the family of Ludovisi, who bought it from the Duc d'Altemps shortly before he was elected to the Papacy. After remaining in his family but a few years, it passed successively to the Conti, the Sforza, and finally to the Torlonia family.

But a short distance beyond the Villa Conti, or Torlonia as it is now called, are two other villas, less known but full of interest, both of which at one time belonged to the Muti family.

The nearer of these, formerly known as Belpoggio, but now as the Villa Palavicini, stands on a spit of land, and is terraced on all sides. Specially interesting is the complex system of grottoes with which the upper terrace was honeycombed, and which extended the whole length of the terrace on both sides. The villa, which is not extensive, is divided into two main levels, the lower being reached by a double ramp. This terrace was formerly laid out with an elaborate arrangement of *cabinets* connected by arbours or pleached alleys, with openings like windows at intervals, through which glimpses of the garden might be obtained. In the more open *parterre* and interspersed among the fountains, several of which still remain, both Greuter (1620) and Blaeu show a number of box-trees clipped into quaint shapes of ships, or birds, or animals, such as lions, peacocks, or spread-eagles, with other topiary work on the upper terrace, all of which have long since perished.

Another delightful villa, though unhappily much modernised in parts, is the Villa Muti. The *casino* is surrounded by terraces on different levels, which follow the trend of the ground and have been most ingeniously treated by the architect. It is not a large place, the whole garden being barely 150 yards square, but its great charm lies in its simplicity and homeliness.

The lower terrace, partly enclosed by walls of bay or ilex, is laid out



as a green-garden in a most delightful and unusual style, with the hedges planted in simple pattern, the centre of each plot being formed by large bosses clipped into fantastic shapes. Some flame-coloured poppies give the only touch of bright colour, for this was never intended to be a flower garden, which was reserved for the adjoining terrace. Here is to be found a delightful mingling of marble statues and trailing vines, Madonna lilies and China roses, with other simple flowers growing in a setting of geometrical box with a background of ilex grove. Here too a tiny fountain forms the centre of a frog-haunted pool, and helps to make "beauty to the eye and music to the ear."

VILLA LANTE IN BAGNAJA

INTO the early history of this villa, which is too long to be recounted here, it is not necessary to enter at length. Let it suffice that the property came into the hands of Cardinal Giovanni Francesco Gambara, of Brescia, about the year 1564.

A small house already existed on the site, and something had been done by his predecessors towards laying out the garden, but it is to this Cardinal that we owe the conception of the present villa. The mania for building villas was beginning to make itself felt in Italy, and the Cardinal, desirous of providing one suitable to his rank, appears to have lost no time in securing the services of architect and craftsmen of no mean order to carry out his wishes. The misfortune is that no reliable name has come down to us in connection with this exceptional piece of work.

Under the Cardinal's personal supervision such progress was made that the fame of it was noised abroad, and he received an intimation from Rome, which he could not afford to ignore, that the money he was spending so lavishly on the embellishment of his villa would be better employed in works of charity. Fortunately much had been already completed, but so interested had the Cardinal been in the fountains and other works about his garden, that only one *casino* of the two he had planned was built, and so matters remained until his death.

No such restrictions seem to have been placed upon his successor, Alessandro Damasceno Peretti, Cardinal Montalto, a nephew of Pope Sixtus V., who, about 1588, built the second *casino* in order to balance the first, and made various changes and additions in other parts of the villa. The work done in his time may be readily distinguished by his armorial



bearings (the lion, the three-lobed mount, and the star), which in some form or other are introduced on several of the fountains, &c.

When it is considered that the various works about this villa must have extended over a period of fifty years or more, it is impossible to praise too highly the spirit which animated the successive artists who carried them out. So entirely in harmony are these works, that they almost give the impression that the whole villa was the conception of one mind.

The ground on which the garden is laid out falls with a gentle slope and is cut into a series of four or five terraces. The water, brought from a distance in an aqueduct, enters the villa at the topmost level, and, working its way downwards, passes through the various fountains in succession ; thus giving the maximum effect.

The two *casini* are placed at the opposite ends of the first terrace from which they are entered, the ground floor being occupied by a *loggia* of three arches which opens on to the *parterre*. This flower garden is about eighty yards square and is laid out with box-bordered beds, some of simple geometrical design, others of more complex scroll-work, and many of these are filled with all sorts of old-fashioned sweet-smelling flowers of the kind endeared to us by the memories of childhood. The whole centre of the garden is taken up with perhaps the most beautiful fountain in Italy. This consists of a square cistern or *peschiera* raised above the garden level and having in its centre an island-fountain in two tiers with balustrades, one above the other. Access to the island is gained by means of four causeways which are also protected by balustrades. As a centre-piece, and above all, stand four graceful nude figures which hold aloft the mount and star of the Montalto family. In addition to the great central jet, water flows from the points of the star and from various masks, keeping the fountain in a state of delicious moisture and giving the centre-piece the look of polished bronze. In the outer basin float four stone *barchette*, similar to those at the Villa Aldobrandini, and the fountain is further embellished with innumerable fountain masks, pine-cone finials, obelisks, and tall fluted vases which at one time also were fountains.

The surrounding garden is pleasantly broken by vases containing lemon-trees hedged about with square cut box, breast high, free-growing

roses, and flowering shrubs. Between the *casini*, the slope is embroidered with patterns of box, flanked by bold stairways which lead the eye upward to a series of fountains and cascades overshadowed by masses of dark foliage that lend an air of mystery to the vista.

The second terrace is enlivened by a circular fountain, built partly within and partly without the sustaining wall. Its central jet is encircled by minor fountains and several concentric water channels ranged one above another. At the next terrace is a semicircular basin within which recline two gigantic river-gods, enriched by brilliant patches of moss and lichen. On either side of this fountain, stairways lead upward, flanked by stepped walls, with tall sculptured vase-fountains and spouting masks, the water falling from one to another. To these fountains the water is conveyed by a mossy channel, the "*catena*," so called from its curious rim of interlacing scroll-work, which takes the place of the usual cascade and makes a pleasing variety. Beyond it you reach the delightful upper terrace, shaded by giant plane-trees and surrounded by tall columns set at intervals in a balustrade. At the further side, where the aqueduct enters, is a fountain in a semicircular recess, and on each side of it are open pavilions of graceful proportions. These were built by Cardinal Gambara, whose name is inscribed on the entablature and whose arms, with the crayfish, appear in a panel above. A curious octagonal fountain forms the centre of the terrace, with several channels rising one above another in steps, quaintly sculptured with *tazze* dolphins and masks, from all of which issue supplementary jets. This is surrounded by a high clipped hedge, with stone benches that follow the curves and angles of the enclosure; a most delightful bower in which to while away a lazy afternoon, to the drowsy accompaniment of the murmuring waters, and the rippling song of birds.

Thus it may be seen, that in the Villa Lante are to be found, carried to the highest pitch of perfection, all those features which go to make the ideal villa; *casini* large enough for all reasonable requirements; the *parterre* spread out beneath the windows, which is always a delight, winter or summer; shady places near at hand; fountains with a plentiful water supply; and beyond the garden, away towards the hilly background, wild woodland stretches.



A not inconsiderable feature of the well cared for Italian villa is the use of flowering plants in pots, disposed around and about the fountains and stairways, to which they lend colour and variety. These are often concentrated in the vicinity of the fountains for convenience of watering, or in some favoured corner of the house terrace. Here, shaded from the extreme heat of the sun, is a group of azaleas, of pearly white or pink, or vivid crimson, and nodding carnations of every hue, making together a most delightful "smash" of colour in contrast with the more sober background.

Of the only two engravings of this villa, which I know, by Francesco Pannini and Frigie respectively, that by the latter is certainly the more reliable. Pannini gives us a large plate, but the drawing is faulty and unconvincing, and the fountains seen between the *casini* are incorrectly and miserably drawn. The inscription on the margin is "Veduta principale della Villa Lante in Bagnaja. Architettura del Celebre Giacomo Barozzi detto il Vignola," which shows that in the 18th century, or two hundred years after its foundation, the villa was attributed to Vignola.

Frigie's print is on quite a small scale and is very rudely engraved; the minor features are merely indicated, yet in such a way that there is really no difficulty in identifying them. At the foot is a crabbed Latin inscription which may be translated—"This villa, comprising gardens, fountains, and woods, was created in a marvellous manner and at great cost, from the foundations, by the Most Illustrious and Reverend Lord Giovanni Francisco Gambara of Brescia. At the present time, however, it belongs to the Most Illustrious and Reverend Cardinal Montalto, who with all zeal and diligence has extended the beauty of the place to greater elegance and spaciousness, sparing no expense in order that the celebrity of its fame should bring thither all the princes of the earth, and justly, abundantly, and completely satisfy them."

He gives a list of the various fountains, &c., and we learn from him that the villa was called the "*Barco di Bagnaia*." The *parterre* still remains as originally laid out, and twelve plots surround the great fountain, each with its little central jet. These plots appear to have a low trellis-fence such as was common in mediæval gardens. The *peschiera* is shown

with its balustraded island and four little boat fountains, but with a centre-piece having two tiers of basins capped by the Montalto arms.

At either end of the house terrace facing the *casini* double porticoes stand. The lower colonnade of these is open ; the upper forms an aviary which is approached from the higher level.

Flanking the two pavilions on the topmost terrace, Frigie shows two other aviaries, on a grand scale, enclosing groves. All that now remains of these is the row of tall columns which formed one side of the great cage. The centre of this same terrace appears to have been occupied by a building of the grotto class, which he calls "Fons coralli," and from which the *catena* took its rise.

The park, or *barco*, which is often supposed to be a later development, was laid out with walks and avenues leading to various fountains and objects of interest, which were half hidden among the thickets. On the higher ground lay the supply reservoir, apparently surrounded by a colonnade, but Frigie's print is not quite clear about this. Facing the entrance to the park is a large circular basin partly excavated from the hill-side, and having a retaining wall decorated with nine tall consoles which carry busts, presumably of the Muses. The terrace above is guarded by a balustrade, which is repeated on the lower level and so completes the circle. Frigie names this "Fons Parnasi," and also shows Pegasus prancing in the midst of it. Pegasus has since taken to himself wings, but the fountain remains. There was also a fountain dedicated to Bacchus and another of the Unicorn ; the latter being sheltered by a pleached arbour which stretched some little way on either side of it. Besides various other fountains scattered about the park there was a labyrinth, not so intricate that you could not hope to find your way through it unaided.

Only some dozen miles away, over rough country lanes, by well-tilled farms and olive-yards gay with many a flower, lies Caprarola and the Villa Farnese. At the rear of the huge pentagonal palace, the *chef d'œuvre* of Vignola, may be found the remains of a most fantastic garden. Fountains and stairways, terrace walls and grottoes, are embellished with all those strange and whimsical creatures that emanated from the fertile brain of the *baroque* sculptor. Great river-gods, tritons, and sea monsters

play in the fountain-basins ; dolphins and *tazze* fringe the stairways and cascades ; and statues, vases, masks, and finials are to be met at every turn.

The most fascinating portion of the villa is that which lies in close proximity to the little pavilion. The ground rises to this point and the pavilion is constructed in two stories, with *loggie* on each, opening on to the upper and lower levels. On the one side a *loggia* looks away over the broad gracious landscape to the snow-capped Apennines ; on the other it looks upon the *parterre* where stout box-hedges, severely geometrical, serve as background to certain low-lipped fountain basins with sea-horses prancing and spouting water. All around, ranged on the low wall, are grotesque terminal statues backed by beautiful old cypresses. At a break in the parapet tritons and unicorns play with the water before it finally descends to the lower level and the long *cascatella*. Unfortunately the architect has not been so successful as the sculptor ; much of his work is heavy and ill-proportioned and would not pass muster but for the help he constantly receives from the sculptor and the "water-artist."

The pavilion with its frescoed *loggie* strikes a much higher note ; it is a most refined piece of work and might be placed fifty years earlier than the bulk of the architectural work. Much of the sculpture is singularly happy and fanciful, and we seem to recognise the hand of one at least of the artists from the Villa Lante.

FLORENTINE VILLAS



THE BOBOLI GARDENS

OWING to exceptional circumstances it was in Rome and its neighbourhood that the most important development of the *maison de plaisance* took place, both in the purely country and the suburban villa. Around Florence, with the exception perhaps of the Grand Ducal villas, no attempt was made to enter into competition with the special luxury of the Eternal City.

Lord Orrery, writing from Florence in 1754, says : "Luca Pitti, a Florentine gentleman, more rich than wise, more envious than prudent, heard with great uneasiness the palace of the famous Filippo Strozzi much commended and admired. It was the largest palace at that time in Florence. 'It shall be so no longer,' exclaimed Luca Pitti ; 'I will build a larger. The palace of Strozzi shall be measured to stand within my court. Every one of my windows shall be as large as his portal.' Luca Pitti verified his boast, but ruined his fortune. He built his palace, and he erected a most magnificent front on the outside, magnificent but heavy ; truly Tuscan, durable as the world itself. By which design the great arch of each window is, on the outside, noble ; on the inside, six parts in seven of it are bricked up to adapt the windows to the size of the rooms ; nor are the chambers divided with the least attention to regularity. . . . Cosmo I., whose riches and grandeur were boundless, bought the palace Pitti, which from his time till the total extinction of his family has been receiving additional ornaments of every kind that can be named. Behind the palace is a large garden, called Boboli, laid out in what is now deemed the old-fashioned taste. I mean statues, fountains, long straight alleys, and clipt hedges, the garden

being at present in a desolate and almost ruinous state. Heretofore crowds of people have enlivened Boboli ; of late it is totally deserted. An amphitheatre of evergreens, formed and fitted exactly to the garden front of the palace has a charming effect, especially at this dead time of the year ; they rise naturally, gradually, and in variety of pleasing shades, one above another. They are absolutely beyond the power of description. On the top of one part of the garden is the great fort which defends the town. In another part a gentle ascent leads to a banqueting-house, which commands a view of the whole city. The banqueting-house is the plainest building imaginable. Such an edifice would not be permitted to hold scythes or shovels, in the gardens of Stow, Chiswick or Claremont."

When Luca Pitti died he left his grandiose palace but half-finished, and his heirs so impoverished that they were unable to carry on the work ; so it came about that in 1549 it was sold to Leonora di Toledo, wife of Cosimo I., who bought land adjoining, and in the following year commenced to lay out the Boboli Gardens. The work was begun under the direction of Niccolo Pericoli, nicknamed Il Tribolo, and was continued by Bernardo Buontalenti ; but much of the architectural work, the fountains, and statuary, as well as the garden court, are due to Bartolommeo Ammanati.

Closing in the court on the side towards the garden is a heavy grotto-structure adorned with a figure of Moses and certain symbolic statues ; *putti* and sea-monsters play around them, and the arms of de' Medici and della Rovere are disposed on either side, the work being carried out in marbles of various colours, porphyry, and bronze.

Above the grotto, upon a terrace level with the *piano nobile* of the palace and of the garden beyond, is an octagonal fountain, constructed with much originality by Susini and Ferucci in 1641, and forming a most delightful foreground to the amphitheatre and its overhanging banks of evergreen trees beyond.

Dolphins and imps of boys disport themselves in the water, and tritons support the upper *tazze*. On the side towards the palace the overflow is ingeniously carried off through four minor basins arranged as *cascatelle*, and deep-ribbed seashells, dolphins, and *puttini* complete the

fountain on either side. Baldinucci states that Susini was paid the sum of 1250 scudi for his various works in marble in connection with this fountain, which is said to have replaced an earlier one by Baccio Bandinelli, some of the statues from which were distributed about the gardens.

Opposite the centre of the palace is a spacious theatre, or amphitheatre as it is commonly called. This has served in times past not only for jousts and games, but likewise for those gorgeous pageants conceived and conducted for the pleasure not only of the audience but also of those taking part in the spectacle, and in the preparation of which some of the greatest artists were employed. A more delightful background for such a purpose it would be difficult to imagine.

This theatre is surrounded by six tiers of stone benches, finished with a balustrade and niches for statues and vases which stand out boldly against the dark ilex hedge with its fringe of cypresses. Until the middle of the eighteenth century the *piazza* of this amphitheatre was kept free from any embellishment, but about 1740 it was planted as a *parterre* with "various sweet-scented flowers in squares bordered by little cypress and box trees," and marble statues and vases with many kinds of orange- and lemon-tree were set about it. Of late the older arrangement has been restored, and gravel paths and rough grass have again taken the place of the *parterre*. The baldness of the present arrangement is emphasised by the two miserable little beds of geraniums and sickly palms that are left. The ugly, modern-looking area, too, that divides the fountain from the garden, helps to give a poverty-stricken air to what might so easily be made the most delightful section of the garden.

The curve of the amphitheatre is broken by a wide walk, which follows the slope of the hill and leads upwards between high hedges of evergreen oak to the *Vivaio* or Fountain of Neptune. This is a capacious cistern or *peschiera*, hemmed in by grass terraces, which supplies the fountains in the lower part of the grounds. The centre-piece of this *vivaio* represents the Triumph of Neptune, and was set up by order of the Grand Duke Cosimo I. It is formed of a great mass of stalactite with Tritons, marine monsters, and huge conchs, "with other

ornaments appropriate to the representation of the Triumph, from which spurt in all directions various jets and giuochi d'acque." Perched on the summit of the rock is the bronze statue of Neptune, larger than life, from whose trident streams of water issue. It is believed that the Triumph was designed for this fountain by Stoldo Lorenzi of Settignano, in imitation of the Chariot of Neptune which, together with other chariots, went about Florence on February 22, 1565, in the grand masquerade representing the genealogy of the gods.

On the slope leading to the amphitheatre below, the steep walk was in all likelihood lined with fountains and a cascade, for which the place seems to have been prepared; but water was never plentiful here, and many of the fountains that still exist have only a scanty supply.

On the brow of the hill, overhanging the city wall, is the *giardino del Cavalliere*; a most charming little private garden, box-bordered, and bright with roses and lilies and many another sweet-smelling flower. In the midst stands a delightful marble fountain, which an *amorino* above and three bronze *babbuini* at the base enliven with jets of water.

From this spot, which is open on two sides, a wonderful view is enjoyed of S. Miniato and the Colli with the Val d'Arno and the snow mountains beyond. The thoughtful Baedeker marks it with an asterisk, consequently crowds of tourists, chiefly German, come to gaze and hang over the low wall in ecstasies of voluble delight. That a landscape could be improved by a foreground never seems to occur to them, so the fascinating little garden is ignored, not one in a hundred deigning to give it so much as a passing glance.

The surface covered by trees in the Boboli Garden is curiously disproportionate to the area of the grounds, being fully two-thirds of the whole. Long straight walks intersect it in all directions, several of the *boschetti* thus formed being subdivided by minor walks arranged in concentric circles, one of which is called a labyrinth, though the name is equally applicable to all.

By far the most finished and harmonious piece of work in the whole garden is the *Vasca dell' Isolotto*. It lies in the inner grounds near the Porta Romana and its conception is claimed by Vasari.

Encircled by a wall of evergreen oak is an oval pool, some hundred



George S. H. Good, 1907

paces long by seventy wide. An island of the same form, reached from either side by bridges, has for a centre-piece Giambologna's celebrated fountain with Oceanus and the rivers Nile, Ganges, and Euphrates, represented by heroic statues. This group is placed above a huge granite *tazza*, the pedestal of which is encircled by a seat, and through the water which falls from the lip of the basin into a runlet below is shown the garden: a quaint conceit of the fountain-artist.

The island makes a most charming private garden, and rejoices in a constant succession of flowers disposed about it in pots as well as in the box-bordered beds. At the waterside is a well-designed balustrade, broken into short sections, the stone-work curving downwards to bracketed pedestals on which stand vases with lemon-trees.

At the landward end of the bridges are wrought-iron gates placed between coupled columns, above which are Capricorns carved in marble; an old device of Cosimo I. who was born under that constellation. At the water's edge, close by these gateways, are grotesque creatures spouting into great sea-shells from which the water falls into other shells beneath. Four other fantastic fountains are disposed around the verge, which form pedestals for certain graceful *amorini* who appear to be playing tricks with the human heart. One places his foot upon a heart which he is about to strike with a hammer; another holds a heart in his hand and attempts to open it with a key. Each of these is by Domenico Pieratti, their fellows in the opposite quarter being by Cos. Salvestrini.

Connecting the various fountains is a wrought-iron fence, provided with numerous tiny jets. These, when in working order, formed a succession of *jets d'eaux* encircling the pool, in the middle of which forlorn Andromeda, chained to a rock, looks expectantly for her Perseus, while a horrid bronze monster threateningly raises his shiny green head at her very feet.

On every side stone benches are set beneath the overhanging ilex hedge, and rustic statues, weather stained, play hide and seek in the greenery. Above the wall of close-clipped evergreen rise high in air the dark spires of cypress and the lighter foliage of deciduous trees, all mirrored in the still pool below.

VILLA PALMIERI

THE Italian villa, which attained its full development in the vicinity of Rome during the sixteenth century, did not make the same rapid progress further north, and many of the villas in the neighbourhood of Florence retain even to the present day their semi-farmhouse characteristics.

Although the country house was often enlarged, or rebuilt in a more palatial style, during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, the gardens not infrequently were laid out on the most modest scale. The Villa Palmieri is no exception to the rule. The *casino*, or *palazzo* as it might be called, though retaining the simpler lines of the Tuscan house, is a fairly large building, and the house terrace, with its statues and grand staircase, is on a proportionate scale with it, and would lead you to anticipate a garden as large, say, as the Villa Medici in Rome ; but what you find is an oval *parterre*, some seventy paces long by forty broad, overlooking the *podere*. This appears to have been the whole garden, which was doubtless supplemented by pergolas or *berceaux* leading into the cultivated ground, and terminating in groups of cypress or stone pine, or an ilex grove with seats set about some sylvan god.

The villa, then known as Schifanoja, came into the hands of Matteo Palmieri, an able scholar and friend of Cosmo de' Medici, about the year 1450 ; but it was not until 1670 that Palmiero Palmieri, a descendant of his, built the present palace (or the greater part of it) and called it after his own name.

The palace with its wide overhanging eaves is a simple, dignified building of good proportions, arranged round a central arcaded *cortile*, and



presenting towards the garden a long low two-storied façade, which is decorated, not unpleasantly, in colour, with a geometrical panelling. Raised above the flat tiled roof is that most essential feature of the Tuscan villa, a *belvedere* or *loggia*. Here, unhappily, its five arches have been glazed and closed up with shutters, thus depriving the house of much of its interest, for the deep shadows of the arcade are an essential part of the architectural scheme. But this is the fate of too many of the Florentine *loggie*. Their original intention, as a connecting-link between garden and house, is lost sight of, and one after another they are enclosed and degenerate merely into one more mundane room.

A wide terrace stretches the whole length of the house, its central bay projecting forward above a roadway and beyond that over a grotto or *salle fraîche*.

On either side of the projecting bay a grand flight of stairs sweeps downwards, bending forwards and following the oval outline of the enclosed garden below. A bold picturesque balustrade encloses terrace and stairway, each pier being finished with some garden god or goddess—Ceres, Pomona, Flora, Bacchus, and many another. How blest must a garden be presided over by these !

In the centre, opposite the great portal, the balustrade is broken, in order to admit a broad fountain *tazza* which is flanked by crouching lions. Wistaria rambles over the balustrade, veiling but not hiding it beneath its delicate lilac clusters, and later in the season, when the blossom has given place to the tender yellow foliage, the gardener puts out his pots of azalea and carnation, geranium and Paris daisy, with here and there a dark green box-tree as a bit of sobering colour.

The enclosed garden below is laid out with grass plots, and scattered over its surface are magnolias, oleanders, and other flowering shrubs. The narrow borders that flank the paths are bright with flowers, and roses and purple clematis ramble at will over the handsome old gate piers almost hiding their curious vase-like finials. In the central basin a tiny fountain makes music, and the scent of lemon and jessamine fills the air.

For more than eighty years the villa has been in English hands, and the grounds have been pushed far into the *podere*. Much planting, especially on the steep hill-side above the *palazzo*, has been carried out

by Lord Crawford, to whose credit also may be placed the laying out of the charming little formal garden, with its beds of old-fashioned flowers and its terra-cotta fountain wreathed in roses and other climbing plants. This garden appears in one of our pictures and makes a delightful foreground to the old palace with its balustraded terrace.

The villa is inseparably connected with the name of Boccaccio, for has it not been "identified" with the one described by him in the untranslatable "Decamerone"?

"The garden was at the side of the palace, and walled round about, which at their first entrance seemed so full of delights that they were the more attentive in viewing every part. All round and through the midst of it were broad straight walks covered with vines, . . . and being all in blossom they gave so delicious a scent joined with other flowers then growing in the garden, that it reminded them of all the spices of the Orient. The sides of these alleys were closed in with white and red roses and jasmine so interwoven as to exclude the sun even at midday, creating an odoriferous and delightful shade. The variety of plants in this place . . . it would be needless to mention, since there was nothing belonging to our climate which was not found there in abundance. In the midst, what seemed more commendable than anything else, was a *prato* of small herbs, spangled with innumerable flowers, and set round with orange and lemon trees, whose branches were filled with ripe fruit and blossoms, at the same time most pleasing to the eye and grateful to the smell. In the middle of this *prato* was a fountain of whitest marble marvellously carved; and from a figure standing upon a column in the centre of the fountain a jet of water spurted up, which in falling made a most agreeable sound. The water which flowed thence ran through the meadow by hidden ways; when it appeared again it was carried to every part of the garden through artfully contrived channels, uniting in one stream at its going out." . . .

"Its beautiful order, its flowers, and its sparkling fountain gave so much pleasure" to the visitors "that all began to affirm, that if Paradise were on this earth they could not imagine what other form it could have but that of this garden; nor could they think what other beauty might be added to it."



VILLA REALE DI CASTELLO

THIS villa belonged to the de' Medici family some time before they became Grand Dukes of Tuscany, and was one of their favourite residences.

So rarely have we the good fortune to possess a coherent and detailed account of an Italian villa by a contemporary hand, that I make no apology for transcribing freely from Vasari's interesting description of this villa, which was laid out and beautified by men personally known to him.

“The Villa di Castello lies at the roots of the Monte Morello, and beneath the Villa della Topaia, which is situate about half-way up the acclivity; it has before it a plain which descends very gradually, and within the space of about a mile and a half, to the River Arno. It is exactly at the point where the ascent of the hill commences from this plain that the palace is situate, that edifice having been originally erected, after a very good design, by Pier Francesco de' Medici.

“The principal front is turned to the south and looks over extensive lawns or meadows, within which are two large ponds of running water, the latter coming from an ancient aqueduct made by the Romans for the purpose of bringing water from Valdimarina to Florence, where the vaulted reservoir of the same is to be found. Thus situate, the palace has an exceedingly agreeable and even beautiful view; the waters before it are divided by a bridge twelve braccia wide, which leads to an avenue of the same width, formed by mulberry trees, covering it closely on both sides and rising to a height of ten braccia, insomuch that they form a vault overhead, beneath which you may walk for three hundred braccia in the

most agreeable shade. This avenue of mulberries opens on to the high road to Prato by a gate placed between two fountains, which give water to the travellers who pass that way, as well as to their animals and the cattle of the neighbourhood.

“The northern front of the palace—that which looks towards the hill—has a lawn before it, the length of which is equal to that of the palace, the stables, and the private garden united, and from this lawn there is an ascent by steps to the principal garden, and the garden itself, rising by a gentle acclivity, extends to such a distance from the palace as to be entirely open to the influence of the southern sun, precisely as if no building stood before it. At its upper end, moreover, the garden attains to such a height that not only is the whole of the palace to be discovered therefrom, but the entire plain extending before and around it, together with the city itself.

“In the midst of the last-mentioned garden there is a wood of high cypresses, with laurels and shrubs of various kinds, which form a circle, wherein is a labyrinth surrounded by hedges of box two braccia and a half high, the growth being so equal, and the whole arranged in so beautiful a manner that they might be taken for a work of the pencil. In the centre of this labyrinth, Tribolo, by command of the Duke, was to erect a marble fountain of great beauty. . . . It was Tribolo’s intention to display the highest powers of art by means of the various jets and ornamental forms into which the water was to be thrown, and by the numerous decorations to be placed about the fountain, around which there was to be a commodious and beautiful range of seats for repose. The marble basin he proposed to make, as was in effect subsequently done, was much smaller than that of the large and principal fountain, and he intended to place therein a figure of bronze, throwing water from its mouth.

“At the end of this garden there was to be a portal in the centre, with marble figures of boys throwing water ; a fountain was to be formed on each side, and in the angles were to be double niches, within which statues were to be placed, similar to those which are in the niches of the side walls, and ranged along the avenues by which the garden is traversed; all to be standing in various compartments and surrounded with verdure.



From the above-mentioned door at the end of this garden a flight of steps conducts to a second garden, of equal width with the first ; but, ascending the hill straight upwards, it presented no great depth, being impeded by the acclivity of the mountain.

“ On each side of this upper garden was likewise to be built a *loggia*, and opposite the door in the wall erected to support the soil of the hill behind, there was to be a grotto with three distinct elevations, each with its basin, wherein water was to fall in the manner of rain. On each side of the grotto was to be placed a fountain, and opposite to these, near the lower wall of the garden, two more fountains were to be constructed, one on each side of the door. In this manner the fountains of the upper garden would have been equal to those in that beneath it, those of the latter receiving their waters from the fountains of the higher garden, wherein were also to be large numbers of orange-trees, which would have had, nay, rather, will have, the most salubrious position that can be conceived, because they will be defended by the wall and the heights from the north wind and all others that might be injurious to them.

“ From this garden of oranges two flights of stone steps, one on each side, conduct to a wood of cypress, pines and ilex, mingled with sweet bay and evergreen shrubs in great variety, and distributed with the most admirable judgment. In the midst of these, according to the design of Tribolo, was to be formed a very beautiful piece of water, which has in effect been done. The space is here gradually restricted till it forms an angle, this being truncated to the breadth of a *loggia*, erected to surround the same ; and from this point, after ascending certain flights of steps, the whole view beneath lies discovered—the palace, the gardens, the fountains, and all the plain below and around them, that is to say, even to the ducal villa of Poggio-a-Cajano and the city of Florence itself ; with distant views of Prato, Siena (Signa ?), and all around to the extent of many miles.

“ Pietro da Casciano had now completed his work of the aqueduct, even to Castello, and had brought all the waters of the Castellina to that place, when it chanced that he was attacked by a most violent fever, whereof he died in a very few days. Thereupon Tribolo, having taken the entire conduct of the building upon himself, perceived that the

waters were not by any means sufficient to effect all that he had it in his thoughts to do. He therefore gained permission from the Duke to conduct the waters of the Petraia to Castello, and caused another aqueduct to be made. He then began to build the grotto, adding the three niches, as also the two fountains, one on each side of the grotto. . . .

“Tribolo then began the fountain of the labyrinth, and the lower part of this he formed of marine monsters in marble, twined together in full relief, and wholly detached from the base, the tails of these animals being interlaced after such sort that nothing better in that manner could well be effected. Having completed this part he then formed the vase, for which he availed himself of a piece of marble which had been long before brought to Castello from the Villa dell’ Antella, together with a large table, also of marble, purchased by Messer Ottaviano de’ Medici from Giuliano Salviati.

“The possession of these resources caused Tribolo to prepare the *tazza* for this fountain earlier perhaps than he might otherwise have done. For the decoration of the same he designed a dance of children, which he arranged around the mouth of the *tazza* and close to the edge or lip thereof; the little boys composing this dance hold festoons of marine plants, which are detached from the marble with the most admirable art. The pedestal also, which Tribolo erected within the *tazza*, is adorned with figures of children and masks throwing water, which are all of extraordinary beauty and excellence. On this pedestal it was the intention of Tribolo to place a bronze statue, three braccia and a half high, representing Florence, and signifying that from the Mounts Asinaio and Falterona come the waters of the Arno and the Mugnone to Florence; and for this statue the master had prepared a most exquisite model exhibiting the figure in the act of wringing with her hands the luxuriant tresses of her hair, whence the water comes streaming on every side.”

This most beautiful *tazza*, with the bronze statue here described, is now at the Villa Petraia, to which place it was removed by order of the Grand Duke Pietro Leopoldo.

“Having brought the collected waters to the first quadrangle of thirty braccia, before described as situate beneath the labyrinth, Tribolo then

commenced the great eight-sided fountain, which was destined to receive into its lowermost basin all the before-mentioned waters. To each of these eight sides ascends a step one-fifth of a braccia in height, and each angle of the eight sides has a ressault, as have likewise the steps, which, projecting thus, present at each angle a step of two-fifths of a braccia, in such sort that the central front of the steps recedes at the ressaults, the direct line being interrupted : a fanciful invention which has a pleasing effect to the eye, while the ascent is found to be very easy. The edge of the fountain has the form of a vase, and the body, or that part which contains the water, is in the figure of a circle. The foot or pedestal in the centre of the basin has eight sides at the lowest part, and continues in this shape, forming eight stages or seats, even to the foot of the *tazza*.

“On each of these stages is the seated figure of a boy in full relief and of the size of life ; these children are in various attitudes, their arms and legs entwined together to form a kind of chain ; all exceedingly beautiful, and constituting a very rich ornament. The edge of the *tazza*, which is circular, projects to the extent of six braccia, while all the water falls equally over the edges, forming a beautiful rain around it, and falling into the basin of eight sides which is below. The boys thus seated on the foot therefore are not wetted, and even have the appearance of being assembled in sport within and beneath the lip of that *tazza* for the purpose of sheltering themselves from the falling waters, exhibiting with supreme grace a sort of childlike delight in the nook within which they have crept, the simplicity and loveliness of which cannot be equalled. Opposite to the four sides of the crossways that lead from the fountain to the garden are four boys in bronze, reclining and lying at play in various attitudes ; these, although subsequently executed by others, are likewise from the designs of Tribolo.

“Above the *tazza* just described he then commenced another pedestal, on the lowermost part of which are statues of four boys in marble, standing on ressaults and pressing the necks of geese from whose bills the water pours. Above these boys rises the remainder of the shaft of this pedestal, from which project small tubes whence the water streams in the most fanciful manner ; where the

pedestal resumes the quadrangular form, the ornament consists of masks, which are very well executed. On the summit of this pedestal is a smaller *tazza*, from the edge of which four heads of capricorns are suspended by their horns ; these throw water from their mouths into the larger *tazza* to form the rain which falls, as we have said, into the first basin or that with the eight sides. Still higher and rising over all is another shaft decorated with various ornaments, among which are boys in *mezzo rilievo* ; they bend forwards to such an extent as to present a space sufficient for the base of a group representing Hercules strangling Antæus, executed after the design of Tribolo by Bartolommeo Ammanati.

“ This principal fountain of Castello was constructed entirely of marble, and was indeed completed to such perfection that nothing better could be wished for in a work of that character ; insomuch that I believe it may with truth be declared the most admirably proportioned, most pleasing, richest, and most beautiful fountain that has ever been constructed, seeing that throughout the whole work, in the vases, basins, figures, and other decorations, the most extraordinary ability, care, and patience are everywhere apparent.

“ Nor will I omit to mention what had been the purpose of Tribolo with respect to the ornament of statues which were to be placed in the great garden of the labyrinth, there to occupy the niches which are regularly distributed around the same. He proposed then, and in so doing had judiciously taken counsel with Messer Benedetto Varchi, a most excellent poet, orator, and philosopher of our times, that at the upper and lower ends of the garden should be placed representations of the four seasons of the year. At the entrance, and on the right hand commencing from the statue of Winter, six figures were to be erected along the wall which descends to the lower part of the garden, all to denote and set forth the greatness and excellence of the house of Medici ; signifying, moreover, that all the virtues are to be found assembled in the person of the Duke Cosimo. These were Justice, Mercy, Valour, Generosity, Wisdom, and Liberality, which have ever dwelt in the house of Medici, and are now all to be found in the most excellent Signor Duke, seeing that he is of a truth most just and merciful, brave and

generous, wise and liberal. Opposite to these statues were to be placed the figures of Law, Peace, Arms, Science, Tongues and Arts. . . .

“All these decorations would without doubt have rendered this the most beautiful, most magnificent, and most richly adorned garden in Europe, but the works were not brought to completion, because Tribolo did not take such measures as he might have done for pressing the works vigorously forward while the Signor Duke was in the mind to have them executed.”

VILLA CORSINI

AT no great distance from the Villa Reale di Castello lies the delightful Villa Corsini. At one time it belonged to the Rinieri family who bought it from the Strozzi about the year 1460, when it was known as "La Lepre dei Rinieri." Later it became the property of Cosimo de' Medici, who had a fancy to unite it with the adjoining villas of Castello and Petraja. After many vicissitudes it was purchased, towards the close of the seventeenth century, by the Corsini family, and considerable changes were made both in palace and garden; probably by the same Antonio Ferri who built the façade of the Corsini Palace in Florence.

The house is of the old Tuscan type, built round an arcaded court, and entered direct from the road as is the case in so many of these Florentine villas. With the exception of the more modern façade, the palace is a plain substantial building, depending for its effect on its good proportions, well-spaced windows, and deep, overhanging roof.

In tracing the history and development of the Roman villa, it is impossible to overrate the assistance given by the prints of Falda and others; but with the Florentine villa the case is different, for we have nothing to fall back on but the eighteenth-century prints of Giuseppe Zocchi, and, though we may be grateful for even these, they are but a poor substitute for the invaluable prints by Falda, Venturini and the rest.

Zocchi devotes one of his engravings to the Villa Corsini, but presents us, as he so often does, with its least interesting aspect. This is the forecourt and the western façade of the *palazzo*, with its somewhat wild *baroque* overlay of pilaster and window frame, finished above with clock-turret and fringe of vases. In the distance are seen the Villa



Petraja and the hilly landscape, the most interesting part of the picture being some peasants who play a game of bowls on the green sward with much energy and gesticulation.

Like its neighbour, the Villa Reale, this villa stands at the point where the broad plain and the foot-hills join, and, as it was on gently sloping ground, only very slight terracing was necessary. To the east of the house a garden-court is enclosed by a semicircular wall of a singularly fanciful type. Seats are built into the low wall, which, curving up on either side, joins a series of tall piers which carry alternately fountain basins and statues representing the four seasons. It is interesting to note that the architect did not trouble to level this piece of ground; seats and piers, fountains and statues rise by a series of slight steps all round the curve.

To the right of this little garden-court lies the *parterre*. Box-bordered beds are ranged around a simple fountain-basin with its wrought-iron guard-rail. The garden beds are carpeted with flowers; pansies, larkspurs, poppies, snapdragons, and, "in the time of roses," all among the lemon trees with their pleasant red-grey pots, roses of every kind and of every hue peep out, for here, under kindly treatment, Bourbons, Teas, Noisettes bloom freely, as though winter were unknown in Tuscany.

On the opposite side of the *palazzo* are the *bosco* and wilderness. Through the midst of this a shady path leads direct to a wide opening among the trees, where, on either side of a moss-grown fountain-basin, curving steps lead upward to the ilex grove and *peschiera*. It is a curious piece of *baroque* planning, with not a straight line anywhere.

The low terrace wall finished with a graceful balustrade curves round to right and left, enclosing the double stairway, each step curving in its turn and all radiating from a roll placed at the outer edge like some newel-post. In the centre is an oval basin decorated with grotesque masks, from which great garlands swing. At the back of this a refreshing stream of limpid water issues from a horse's head, which, surmounted by a coronet, forms the centre of a *bizarre* arrangement of rococo scroll-work.

It is all very fantastic and no doubt wicked in its disobedience of all the canons of architecture, yet, thanks in part to the kindly weather

stains and the agreeable half-light in which it has the good fortune to be placed, it gives far more pleasure than much of the work one sees which is correct in every detail.

Vasari tells us that "for the villa of Cristofano Rinieri at Castello, Tribolo executed the statue of a River God, the size of life, in grey stone; this he did while occupied with the fountains of the duke, and placed it in a niche at the head of the *peschiera*, which extends beyond the aviary of the villa. The statue pours water into a very large basin of the same stone, and that figure, though made of several pieces, has every part conjoined with so much care that it appears to be formed entirely of one piece." This fountain no longer exists, but the "large basin" is possibly the one used for the fountain in the *bosco* already mentioned.

In another place Vasari makes reference to this villa. Pierino, a nephew of Leonardo da Vinci, was placed as a youngster under Tribolo, who was so pleased with his progress that, "remarking the zeal displayed, and having at that time just made a large basin in stone for Cristofano Rinieri, Tribolo gave to Piero a small piece of marble, that he might make the figure of a boy thereof, which figure the master intended to be that which was to throw water into the above-named basin. Piero received the marble with great rejoicing, and having first made a little model of clay, he afterwards completed his work in a manner so graceful, that Tribolo, and all those who saw the same, felt persuaded that he would eventually prove to be one of those masters who become distinguished in their art." Unfortunately Piero died when only twenty-three years of age, and Vasari laments the death of so promising a young sculptor.

As is usual in these Tuscan villas, there is no dividing line between the *podere* and the garden; you may wander by grassy walks among the ripening grain, or beneath the purple clusters of grape, to some quiet corner of the farm, where, within the shade of some wide-spreading pine, mossy seats invite you to pause awhile.

"Laid upon the ground in the *bosco*, the writer found a row of some dozen deities, brought, so the gardener said, from the Palazzo Corsini in the Lungarno where they had formed part of the decorations of the parapet. Doubtless ere this they have been set up in the garden, thereby adding not a little to its gaiety and interest.



VILLA AMARI

MONTAIGNE, that most naïve and cosmopolitan of travellers, writing of the Italian villa and its most delightful surroundings, says: "The *vigne*" (a word often used for villa) "here assume the form of pleasure-grounds, and are places of singular beauty; here I first learnt how much art can do in transforming rugged, hilly and uneven spots into delightful gardens, which even borrow an infinity of graces, not known among us, from the very irregularity of the surface." This is no less true of the modest villa than of its pretentious neighbour, which lords it over half a hillside.

The Villa Amari possesses in perfection all those qualities most desirable in a villa, having a southern aspect and being sheltered from cold northerly winds by the rising ground behind, yet with such elevation above the plain that there is a pleasant breeze stirring even on the warmest day. Its gardens, though not on the grand scale to which we are accustomed in the vicinity of Rome, have that delightful combination of sunny terraces and shady alleys so essential in a climate subject to alternations of heat and cold.

It must have been just such a garden that Gio. Battista Ferrari had in his mind's eye when he wrote in 1633 in his "*de Florum Cultura*": "First let the man whose nature exults in the culture of flowers choose for his flower-garden a plot exposed to a healthy climate, and remote from marshes, lest the gardener himself, among the gaily coloured flowers, should by breathing pestilential air be overcome by the pale hue of death; not facing a river, lest he should breathe cold and damp, and therefore unhealthy air; and if possible close to his house, so that

he may have a golden age of eternal spring at home, and may see a paradise of flowers laid out below his windows ; as large as possible, lest the various and manifold nation of flowers should be too closely crowded ; sheltered from the north, whose deadly cold might be breathed by the tender plants in winter ; turning towards the South, whose warm, humid, gentle-blowing breath is the life of the flowers. So let not the little garden be inferior in the amenity of its site to Italy herself, which, sheltered from the cold of the sterile north-wind by her Alpine walls, seemed to Varro to be one orchard spread out towards the fertile warmth of the Southern sky."

In character with the garden, the *casino* is one of those charming old Tuscan houses made to be lived in, and not merely a *maison de plaisance* visited for a short *villeggiatura* when in the late summer the city becomes insufferable : a long, low-lying house, its upper windows well within the deep shadow cast by the great overhanging eaves, and shuttered with cool green *persiennes*. Above the roof, the customary turret, without which no Tuscan house would be complete, breaks the line of warm grey tiles and recalls the days when a strong tower meant something more than ornament.

The house stands upon a broad paved terrace, with the garden spread out beneath its windows. Below the garden comes the steeply sloping ground chequered with corn and vine and olive, with here a line of sombre cypress and there a group of dark stone-pines indicating the presence of some villa ; then the wide grey plain, and that "city of domes and towers" and the greyer hills beyond. Parallel to the terrace wall a double stairway of a dozen steps or so, arching over a little grotto, leads to the *parterre*. The whole face of the terrace and the stairway itself is embowered in roses of all sorts and other luxuriant climbing plants, with espaliers of lemon between.

The shape of the garden being a somewhat extended oblong, the main paths keep to the good safe rule and follow the lines of the boundary wall, while others, crossing, meet the main central alley. Some of the rectangular plots thus formed are further subdivided into smaller beds by narrow paths, eighteen inches only in width, marked out with rounded kerbs of local sandstone.



Wm. S. Elford 1942

Placed in the centre of the *parterre*, in line with the stairway on the one hand and the *belvedere* on the other, is the most important feature of the garden—the Fountain of Venus. The figure from which the fountain derives its name has been attributed to Giambologna ; certainly it is a piece of sculpture of which even he had no need to be ashamed, though probably, like the charming little fountain figure in the Buontalenti grotto of the Boboli gardens, it is an early work.

Venus or water nymph, it is all one, so only she stand sweetly against the deep blue sky, the purity of the marble enhanced by the warm grey stone basin and the strong shadow cast on the slim pedestal below.

The great fluted *tazza*, above which the goddess stands, receives the spent water that rises in one slender jet and breaks into spray above her. From this *tazza* the water, instead of brimming over in the usual way, escapes through the lips of four masks, set together Janus-wise close beneath the overhanging basin. Set round the fountain's brim is a simple wrought-iron guard-railing, with panels of richer work at the angles. Unspoilt by paint, its pleasant purple and orange rust is in perfect harmony with its surroundings. How the tidy English fingers, that chance this way, must itch to give it a coat of some horrible uninteresting paint, and to grub up the handsome acanthus and other weeds that luxuriate in every cranny of the beautiful stone kerb !

Four stone benches on bracketed feet stand round the fountain, set back against the curving hedge of box, and half shaded by ancient lemon trees, which with their satisfactory earthenware pots form such a feature of the garden.

Beyond the fountain, a break in the low terrace wall makes a little *belvedere*. Piers some six feet in height, with moulded caps, support pleasing elongated *tazze*, once fountains and now half hidden beneath a wealth of pink China rose, which here, free to follow its own sweet will, clambers over the stonework and falls in festoons and cascades of blossom. In the treatment of these piers occurs one of those quaint touches of fancy often shown by the fountain-artist. Pier and low wall are united by a shallow curving buttress ornamented with a grotesque mask, from whose gaping mouth the water (descending from the little fountain above) issues and falls into a shell-shaped basin carved in the coping of the wall.

Unhappily a severe winter plays sad havoc with these minor fountains, and it is long since this, and others similar to it at the extremities of the garden, have added their quota to the freshness and gaiety of the villa.

The flagged pavement about the *belvedere* is pierced with numerous tiny holes for *jets d'eaux*, but, like the majority of *guiochi d'acque*, their first use was in all likelihood for cooling the pavement during the heat ; the pleasing sport of wetting your friends being an afterthought. Judging from Montaigne's account of his own experience at Pratolino, people seem to have taken a drenching in very good part. "In another place, they had an amusing experience of the trick I have mentioned before ; for as they were walking about the garden, looking at the various objects of interest, the gardener, who had just before left them for the purpose, while they were standing to admire some marble statues they came to, discharged upon them, from under their feet and legs, an infinity of springs of water, so small that, till you looked closely, they were invisible, and which had just the appearance of small rain, and they got regularly wet through, in the lower part of their persons. . . . They have this sort of trick in a good many places in this part of the country."

Another interesting feature of this garden is the aviary, without which no villa in the old days was thought complete. It lies on either side of the central alley, at the western end of the *parterre*. Slender stone columns with composite capitals of beaten copper sustain a wooden entablature, above which was placed the open-work roof ; wire netting filled in the spaces between, and the whole stood on a low stone plinth. In order to afford a better view of the occupants, the sides towards the alley are hollowed out, thus giving a pleasant variety to the outline. These aviaries are troublesome places to keep in repair, and have in consequence fallen considerably out of use. That at one time they were a source of pleasure to their owners is evident from the sums of money often spent upon them. In the Boboli gardens the aviary was on such a scale that "woods and glades, alleys and fountains" were included within it, "so that the creatures preserved there in great numbers might enjoy the air and the aspect of the grove."



The charm of this garden is due in no small measure to the flowers, which on every side, beneath the peach and almond and *nespole* trees, fill the beds to overflowing ; but they seem to flourish best in the shadow of the great lemon-pots, their roots tucked snugly away in the moist earth beneath the broad pedestals. Here luxuriate great clumps of orange day-lily, larkspurs white and pink, blue and purple, the fragile-looking French and Shirley poppies, the sun-loving zinnia, and the marigold and gaillardia rejoicing in the warm earth. Madonna lilies, too, and roses of every sort, and sturdy hollyhocks add to the wealth of colour, with iris purple and white and yellow, one of the most desirable being of a lovely pale primrose with many small blossoms on one tall stem ; but the exquisite pale blue iris that fringes the terraces out in the farm is too common for admittance. Nor are the sweet-scented old-fashioned things forgotten, such as carnation and pink, mignonette and cherry-pie, rosemary and lavender—what lavender, for in Italy it gives a full head of bloom, exceedingly beautiful but unhappily only too quickly past ! How well, too, this garden shows the artistic value of the ripening seed-vessels, which in tidy English gardens are usually considered an eyesore, the soft, grey, feathery heads of valerian and the great seed-pods of the common poppy—for hundreds of years drawn with such loving care by artists, but, like so much that is picturesque, called “unsightly” by the gardeners who promptly consign them to the bonfire.

A FLORENTINE TERRACE

OF the innumerable gardens of lesser note within the city walls, that at one time added to the gaiety and charm of Florence, but few remain of any interest. How many of these have been swept away during recent so-called improvements, it would not be easy to say. As Ouida writes: "Every day some architectural beauty, some noble avenue, some court or *loggia* or gateway, some green lawn or shadowy ilex grove or sculptured basin, musical with falling water and veiled with moss and maidenhair, is swept away for ever."

In Italy as in England it is only the minority who care for any of these things, but even now in unexpected corners some quiet garden betrays its presence by its overhanging boughs of ilex or bay, or by some weather-stained statues dimly seen among overgrown bushes of myrtle. Here a factory overlooks what was once a noble garden, and still some oleanders and flowering shrubs with a wild growth of clambering rose surround a dilapidated fountain. In yet another place a *baroque* gateway with boldly modelled terra-cotta vases opens into a little formal garden, with a fountain set back against the wall, presided over by some forlorn water nymph, and flanked by trees of *nespola* and almond.

Even in the centre of the city not a few grand *cortile* still retain their fountain, despite the mania for privacy which has enclosed far too many of them with that modern abomination a sheet-iron gate-screen. Not far distant from San Marco is an oblong *cortile* which gives an excellent idea of the old garden court. Opposite to the entrance gate stands a Venus, within a shallow niche that makes part of a *bizarre* architectural



screen surmounted by a wide broken pediment. Niches and pilasters, entablature and curving pediment are all encrusted with a rude mosaic of coloured stones and marble. At the ends of the court are other niches provided with fountain basins, and doubtless at one time a delightful box-garden, with simple flowers and orange trees, occupied the space now given up to a somewhat uninviting jumble of shrubby plants and half-starved palms.

In order to gain some perception of what a city garden could be in the halcyon days of Florence, we must turn to the pages of Bocchi. Writing about the middle of the sixteenth century, he gives in *Le Bellezze della Città di Fiorenza* a delightful picture of the gardens attached to one of the Acciaiuoli palaces in the Borgo S.S. Apostoli. "Besides this there is a garden on strong arches about fifteen cubits high, in a street close to the Arno and looking due south, where the air is soft and pleasant. There in pots and on espaliers are such delightful greenery and fruits, such as lemons and pomegranates, that although the space is not really large, yet the delight it gives is so great that it appears so. Above this and behind, rising yet higher, is another terrace filled with similar trees; it is marvellous to see the quantity of fruit produced and what good condition it is in. Above, and still further back is yet another terrace, more than thirty cubits from the ground and the view thence is so beautiful that the soul is rejoiced; wherever a man turns he enjoys the sweet air, full of the perfume of fruit and of flowers which are ever abundant according to their season. Water is lifted by ingenious devices from below up to the third-floor garden, so that the moisture when dried up by the heat can be quickly restored. In the lower garden is a beautiful fountain of Carrara marble ornamented with lovely statues. A room, of large dimensions, opens on to this garden, with a fine ceiling and more than thirty portraits of the principal ladies of our city, who are famed for their beauty."

On the other side of the Arno, between the river and the Porta S. Giorgio, where there is more breathing space, many a charming garden is still to be found, often clinging in precarious fashion to the hill-side. One quite ideal little garden overhangs the Via dei Bardi, and is entered through a *loggia* (now enclosed) from the first floor of one of

the lesser palaces. On two sides it is protected by high escalopped walls, and over the third you may look down twenty feet to the busy street below. Its central feature is a little artless fountain, placed beneath the shadow of an octagonal arbour which is wreathed with vines and finished with a vane ; making a deliciously cool spot in the midst of the garden. Straight paths divide it into four small plots that are always gay with simple flowers, such as monthly roses, hollyhocks, lilies, poppies, and larkspurs ; and on one side room has been found for a solitary cypress and a group of shady trees. Above one corner an armed knight stands guard, his shield emblazoned with the Capponi arms.

Not far distant, overhanging the river, is a little terrace, that, like a swallow's nest, seems to cling to the face of an old palace. A few years ago this was little more than a bare platform, with nothing to recommend it but the lovely view. Now, thanks to much loving care and thought, it has been converted into one of the brightest spots in all Florence. Raised as it is high above the road, for it is attached to the second floor of the palace, everything naturally must be grown in pots or cases ; but nowhere is pot-culture better understood than in Italy, and, though some plants, like the carnation, succeed better than others, there are few that will not yield to careful management.

Woodbine and climbing roses, jessamine and wistaria vie with each other in their efforts to cover wall and trellised *pergola*, forming towards one end of the terrace an arbour of denser green, with an ideal lounging-place beneath its shade. At other points slighter arches carry strong, free-blooming roses, such as "Reine Marie Henriette," or "Maréchal Niel" with its loose pale flowers, "Gloire de Dijon," and the sweet Pink Rambler. Many another rose, including the lovely "Safrano," "Celestine Forestier," "Madame Lambard," "Marie van Houtte," and "Anna Ollivier," which finds no room on the over-crowded trellis, hangs over the iron balustrade in untrained profusion, and fills the air with its sweet fragrance.

Beneath the *pergola*, shelter is found for some choice carnations or azaleas, shade-loving lilies, or less robust roses, and other flowers, which when exposed to the full rays of the sun would pass away too quickly.

But all along the terrace beyond is to be found every sort of old-fashioned flower : hollyhocks and canterbury-bells, zinnias and marigolds, stocks and sweet-peas, with here a group of tall Madonna lilies and there a throng of purple larkspurs, while yellow snapdragons hang over the terrace wall and nod familiarly to the passer-by.

Where all is beautiful it is a little difficult to say under what aspect the garden may be seen to best advantage ; perhaps we should choose those early days when columbine and peony still linger, and the sweet yellow Banksia rose mingles its exquisite clusters with the pale lilac wistaria, each enhancing by delicate contrast the beauty of the other. At what time, however, you visit the little terrace it matters not, for flowers are always waiting there to greet you. If, as may happen in the cooler months, these should be few and far between, there is always the glorious view of domes and towers, of lovely ancient bridges and winding river, of Fiesole and the villa-sprinkled landscape and the far-reaching purple mountains, to compensate you for their absence.

OTHER TUSCAN VILLAS



VILLA DI CANIPAROLA

THE spurs of the Apennines in the neighbourhood of Florence are strewn with villas far and wide. So far as their gardens are concerned, the majority of these have unhappily lost what interest they once possessed ; in other words they have lost their Italian character, without gaining any equivalent in the shape of flowers to compensate for the loss. The landscape gardener has done incalculable mischief, and the average Florentine garden to-day consists of nearly equal proportions of rough weedy grass (it cannot be called turf) and loose small shingle, with some rather uninteresting shrubs and "fir-trees," palms and other "exotics," and possesses none of the charm which we associate with an English garden.

Fortunately, however, many exceptions to this rule exist ; notable among which may be mentioned the Villa Gamberaja, unhappily no longer accessible. It occupies a hill-side near Settignano, with a delightful view of Florence and the Val d'Arno. The *casino*, of the old Tuscan type, a square, simple building with deep overhanging eaves and an ideal colonnaded *loggia*, close beneath the roof on the southern side, is built round an arcaded court. It stands towards one end of a broad terrace, and is detached from the hill-side by a wide grass walk, which is extended in both directions and terminates at one end in a semi-circular arrangement of fountain and grotto, surrounded by a fine group of cypresses, and at the other in a balustrade, with a statue and obelisks, that overhangs the *podere* and the valley looking towards Rovezzano.

The *parterre*, which shares with the *casino* the principal terrace, has been laid out of late years with four "quarters" surrounding a circular

fountain. Each of these quarters consists of a rectangular pool encircled by a flower border, and the garden ends with a semicircular pool within a curving arcade of roses and greenery. The scheme of this *parterre* is good, but the brand-new stonework gives it an unpleasingly cold look that only age can take away. Nevertheless the tall flowers and their dark background of trees, and the old cypress hedge with a statue peeping out here and there, reflected in the dark still waters, have a charm all their own. It would be interesting to know in what way this part of the garden was laid out originally, but on this point Zocchi, who devotes three prints to the villa, gives us no assistance.

The special feature, however, of the villa is a most exquisite little oblong garden-court, entered by a gateway in the retaining wall at the rear of the *casino*. This is about seventy feet in length by sixteen in width, and terminates in a semicircle, with three niches for statues surrounding a fountain basin, above which is suspended a great two-handled urn. From the middle of each of the longer sides a double staircase leads upwards, to the *bosco* on the one hand and the *giardino segreto* on the other. These stairways have balustrades, and salient points are surmounted by charming statues and busts, obelisks and vases, each stairway making several pauses before it finally reaches the top. The arrangement of this court and of the stairways is quite unique, and it is a thousand pities that the name of the architect cannot be rescued from oblivion. The detail throughout points to a date early in the seventeenth century.

Yet one more unspoiled garden must be mentioned before we leave the immediate neighbourhood of Florence. This is a little villa not very far distant, which faces towards the north and is perched high above a narrow valley, where, thanks to the amphitheatre of hills behind it, the sun sets early : a place well suited for the long hot summer days. A single terrace carries villa and farmstead, with the *podere* stretching above and below. The *casino* divides this terrace unequally, and has on one side a *loggia* looking on to a well-shaded garden-court, and on the other a similar *loggia* which opens on to the little flower-garden.

The garden is divided into many small plots, easily accessible, and full of bright simple flowers which, thanks to the northerly aspect, last well



into the summer. A retaining wall, adorned with an architectural screen of pilasters and entablature, with statues in niches at frequent intervals, and other touches of ornament in lighter vein, runs the whole length of the garden. The central niche is emphasised by a quaint pedimental arrangement carried above the coping, with a small obelisk in the middle, and heraldic birds and beasts placed on either side, and a coat of arms below. The whole of this is reflected in the most delightful manner in a wide stone channel, raised well above the garden level. At one end, this channel disappears in the depths of a grotto, beneath a balustraded stair. This stairway, which is decorated with charming *puttini*, in the style of Verrocchio, leads to the farm above, passing a fountain-niche mid-way. An extensive view over the parapet, that bounds the garden on the other side, gives excuse for a *belvedere* with seats and displaying some little architectural fancy. Crowning the low wall are many pots of carnations, grown as only Italians know how to grow them; not tied up stiffly, but allowed to hang their heads freely and naturally.

The garden ends with a curving wall, half hidden behind festoons of climbing roses, above which some vases and curious beasts manage to rear their heads. Through a wicket-gate, a few steps lead to the *boschetto* of ilex and cypress, with here and there stone seats and weather-worn statues.

It must not, however, be imagined that the villa is confined to the neighbourhoods of Florence, Pistoja, or Siena. The *maison de plaisance* is naturally found in greater numbers in the vicinity of the larger cities, but scattered all over Tuscany are many country houses, which occupy a place equivalent to the old English manor house, and were intended to be lived in all the year round.

To the latter class belongs the Villa di Caniparola, which lies at the foot of the Apennines, at some considerable distance from Florence. Its situation is similar to that of Pliny's Tuscan villa, for it occupies ground only slightly raised above the meadow-land, and has the mountains set back some little distance at its rear. The *casino* stands about a hundred paces from the high road, the flower garden only intervening, and is approached by a shady drive that follows the garden wall to a rectangular forecourt, in the centre of which the well-head stands between stone columns.

The private garden is enclosed by walls, and may be entered either directly from the road or through gateways on either side of the *casino*. It is arranged on the simplest lines, and, as the ground slopes gently away from the house, only slight levelling was called for. This takes the form of a house terrace, raised about three feet above the general level, and protected by a marble balustrade built on a gentle curve and interrupted in the centre by wrought-iron gates of singular beauty. This delicate piece of work is the more remarkable from its rarity, especially in connection with a country house, and it would be interesting to know its history. In a country where the minor arts were carried to such a pitch of perfection, it is not a little surprising to find the art of working in iron so little cultivated. A village smith in England would have been ashamed to produce such a clumsy piece of railing as that which surrounds the *Vasca dell' Isolotto* in the Boboli gardens, and it is no exaggeration to say that more good wrought iron is to be found in a single English county than in the whole of Tuscany.

Some sloping steps of brick and marble lead down to the *parterre* of clipped box which is laid out in a number of not too intricate geometrical plots. These plots are filled with roses, good hardy flowers, and a sprinkling of annuals; lemon-trees in vases being placed at all salient points. In the centre, raised upon a couple of shallow steps, is a simple octagonal fountain-basin of marble, the angles of which are emphasised by curving acanthus leaves that connect its moulded rim with the edge of the upper step. The space between is filled in with a mosaic of white, red, and dark-green pebbles; the mosaic being repeated on the lower step in combination with a red brick edging. In the association of brick and marble, in a country where marble is a common building material, there is nothing strange or incongruous; on the contrary, the combination has a most delightful effect, especially when the hand of Time has passed gently over it.

From this fountain wide paths radiate, the canted angles being occupied by marble benches with bracketed feet, set within tall screens of box that form a rude back and arms, and curve down so as to meet the edging of the adjoining beds. Except at midday, one or other of these seats is always in shadow, and it would not be easy to conceive a more



George S. Elwood

delightful nook in which to rest awhile and survey the garden in all its glory of May roses.

The walls of the garden, on the cooler sides, are nearly lost behind masses of creepers and free-growing roses ; those facing to the south are screened with espaliers of lemon, which in winter are protected by a temporary roof of tiles, for it is only on the coast that the lemon can be left unsheltered, and even there a rigorous winter tries it severely.

The roses are an unusually good selection, and include not only the better French and Italian sorts, but also many of English extraction such as Viscountess Folkestone, Killarney, Charles Lawson, Mrs. John Laing, Duchess of Albany, John Bright and Beauty of Waltham, to which the gardener gives his own pronunciation, as is the way of gardeners all the world over. Standard roses are not much grown in Italy, but in this garden they play an important part, and must be considered on the whole a great success. *Pyrus Japonica* too is grown as a standard, and has a mass of exquisite bloom. It would doubtless succeed equally well in the south of England, and would be an acceptable addition to our gardens, for though the blossom is soon over, the dark rich foliage would always be pleasant to the eye.

The flowering season even in the best managed of these Italian gardens is all too short, and in a late spring (such as that when these drawings were made) everything seems to burst into flower at once. For a month the little garden is a mass of blossom, in which roses form a prominent feature, together with tree-peonies, the delicate "Riviera May," pale yellow Spanish iris, the old sweet-scented white pinks, freesias, columbines purple and white, and other flowering plants too numerous to mention.

How delightfully the *casino*, with its long, low, sweet lines, stands in relation to the garden with its beautiful central *loggia*, the connecting link between house and garden. Could anything be better than the disposition of its parts ? The flat roof, broken by the simple bell-cote ; the deep overhanging cornice, shading the upper range of windows ; the double staircase with its balustrade, leading up to the *loggia* ; the deep shadow of the arcade, giving value to the slim columns. And then how exquisite is that combination of warm pink, creamy white marble,

and greenish grey. Immediately outside the garden is a little knoll, to the top of which a narrow stairway leads, and there, beneath the shade of tall cypresses, is placed a circle of stone seats which makes a *belvedere*. Here you not only gain the advantage of the fresher breeze, but also of a view over the *campagna* which is denied to the closely sheltered garden below.



VILLA GARZONI

THOUGH apparently laid out with the intention of producing a grand *coup d'œil* as first seen from the entrance gateway, the Villa Garzoni is so well designed that, as you advance further into the recesses of the garden, it unfolds one delightful picture after another.

A wide grille at the lower end lays the garden open to the public gaze. In the foreground is the more elaborate *parterre*, beyond lies a succession of terraces, and the steep hill-side above is clothed with ilex woods. Following the line of stairways and fountains, the eye is led upwards through a broad opening in the *bosco* till it rests on the colossal statue of Fame which crowns the summit. Much of the architectural detail of the villa is debased, and scattered about the gardens and filling the niches are florid statues larger than life; but the general scheme of the garden is so good that you overlook any minor shortcomings and even forget that they exist.

The site upon which the gardens are laid out is singularly irregular, even for an Italian villa. It almost looks as if the architect had taken a delight in combating the difficulties presented by such an odd-shaped piece of ground. In this case the irregularity is the more curious, as unlike Frascati, the whole region around was under the lordship of the Garzoni family. Yet the villa is full of anomalies; not only does a public way cut the *bosco* into two parts (necessitating a bridge), but the approach to the little town which is perched on the hill behind is remarkable for its peculiarity. In order to reach it, it is necessary to climb the fourfold *ramp* that leads to the grand portal of the palace, and to pass through the palace and the arcaded cortile. That the only

approach to the village is through the castle itself is due to the fact that the village lay within the castle walls, an interesting and possibly unique survival of feudalism. The palace, lying well back and to one side of the gardens which it overlooks, appears to have been remodelled and enlarged during the first half of the seventeenth century, but a castle stood there long before that time, and underwent a long siege from the Florentines in 1430.

The garden, as it now exists, probably dates from the early years of the eighteenth century, but the general scheme of the villa is possibly much older. It would be necessary to go far to find a garden as complete and as little modernised as this. Even in the vicinity of Rome, rich as it is in villas, there are few superior to it, and in all Tuscany there is nothing to compare with it. Gardens like that of the Villa Lante rely for their interest largely upon the work of mason or sculptor ; here the sculptor's art is a matter of secondary importance, and interest centres in the walls of living verdure and the gardener's treatment of them. Scattered over the length and breadth of Italy were many gardens, which, like this one, were made a delight by their restful green hedges clipped as fancy directed ; but a short period of neglect, a stupid gardener, or the caprice of fashion, consigned the majority to oblivion. Few of these villas, however, can have been so elaborately devised or so charmingly carried out as this Villa Garzoni, and, taking the place as a whole, you may seek far ere you find a more complete example of an Italian villa.

Immediately within the entrance gate lies the flower garden, enclosed by high hedges of cypress whose tops are fancifully clipped in curves and bosses. In plan it is symmetrical, alternately curved and straight hedges giving opportunities for a most exquisite play of light and shade in the rich velvety green ; for cypress, when clipped, has if possible a more beautiful texture than yew. Originally laid out as a pure *parterre de broderie*, the flowers in their insinuating way have gradually crept in, until, at the present day, the curving and interlacing box is quaintly and interestingly mingled with flowers which break up, and often disguise, the intricate pattern.

On either side of the broad central walk is a circular fountain-basin



some fifty feet in diameter, which, unlike the majority of fountains of earlier date, has no centre-piece. In place of the centre-piece is a powerful jet, which, rising a hundred feet in the air, breaks into finest rain, and, as the great basin is insufficient to catch the falling spray, all the flowers in its vicinity are bedewed with moisture.

Set back in the cypress hedge, and elsewhere about the *parterre*, are box trees cut into whimsical shapes. It is marvellous what great variety of form can be obtained by a gardener with some inventive genius and a pair of shears ; his stock in trade is merely some bosses and ribs, flutings and spheres, with perhaps a spiral or twisted form, which he has to arrange as ingeniously as he may about a square or circular core. The gardener of the older generation, with instinctive good taste, was able, as a rule, to produce from these simple forms the most delightful combinations, which give to the box an exquisite play of light and shade certainly not possessed by the unclipped tree. Any one who looks at a well-considered piece of clipped work, such as that to be found in this garden or at Levens and Barncluith, will hesitate to join with Pope in the cheap witticism which he levels against topiary work in general.

Playing at hide and seek among the rose-bushes and box-trees, or reflected, like Narcissus, in the fountain pool, are many statues of gods and goddesses, fauns and nymphs ; here Bacchus, wine cup in hand, and Diana with her bow ; there the stately Juno and the simpering Venus ; each placed upon a rococo pedestal of scrolls and spirals further adorned with rude stone-mosaic. These statues would possibly impress more favourably (for some of them are reminiscent of the antique) if they were not quite so pronounced ; standing, as they do, against a setting of deepest green, the effect is, to say the least, startling. It is useless to disguise the fact. They are whitewashed ! They are made of hard stucco, and in this respect resemble much of the garden decoration at the Villa d'Este and other villas of the best period in the vicinity of Rome.

The *parterre* is continued on a higher terrace, raised only a couple of feet above the first garden. A deep box hedge and taller flowers conceal the union of the two sections. Here also stone seats are set back in snug recesses of clipped box, the edging of the border curving upwards in order to form the back and arms. In the centre a few broad steps

ascend ; flanked by two statues, one of Apollo, the other of Daphne from whose extremities the laurel leaves sprout in the most realistic fashion.

This terrace is divided into two main plots, which are again subdivided, the centre of each plot being occupied by the Garzoni coat of arms, with coronet and mantling outlined with box, and filled in with marble of approximately correct heraldic colours. Around this are set four knots, as the old gardeners called them, laid out in box and framed with simple straight line work, the device of the inner filling being somewhat more complex than that of the outer. These knots are said to date back to the eighteenth century ; certainly some of the box edging is almost solid with twiggery and has the appearance of great age. All the beds, with the exception of that occupied by the coat of arms, are filled with flowers ; the outer border with pansies, gaillardias, bell-flowers, carnations, pinks, and other low-growing things ; the more central beds with taller plants such as delphiniums, fuchsias, phloxes and some tall bushes of tea rose.

At the time of the writer's first visit to this villa, a great many years ago, some of the beds were filled with ranunculus (rosellina the gardener called it) of every conceivable colour, from white through yellow and orange to richest red, and growing with the utmost luxuriance. Such a remarkable show is rare, if not unknown, in England, where, as a rule, this lovely flower does not receive the attention it deserves. This second *parterre* is laid out on a decided slope, and its design is seen to advantage from the entrance gate. Above this the terracing begins in earnest. Three terraces follow in succession, the sustaining walls being separated from each other by a space of little more than thirty feet, and thus concentrating the stairways within a comparatively small space, which gives the effect of one grand stair rather than of three separate stairways.

Much ingenuity is shown in the disposition of these stairways. The first leads off on either side of a fountain niche and is carried to right and left in a single flight of some eighteen steps which land directly opposite the commencement of the next flight. An extensive and somewhat elaborate grotto is entered by an archway beneath the second flight, the



stairs of which (also about eighteen in number) run the reverse way to the first and so land in the centre. The third staircase belongs to the horse-shoe type, but its arrangement will be better understood by reference to the pictures given here than by a detailed description. The ball ornament, which has been used liberally on the lower balustrades, is supplemented on this staircase by monkeys cleverly modelled in terra cotta. These monkeys, dressed in long jackets and armed with a spiked glove, are represented in the act of playing the favourite Tuscan ball game, *Giuoco del Pallone*. Aping the attitudes of men, these small baboons are many of them intensely funny, and the artist must have been closely familiar with both the ball-player and the monkey tribe to succeed in producing such an amusing series.

At the head of the great stairway, supporting tall piers and guarding the opening to the cascade, are snow-white statues of nymph and satyr. Above this platform stretches the unusual triple cascade, on either side of which gently sloping stairs lead upward, the whole scheme being enclosed by tall hedges of ilex. Here, as at Tivoli and Frascati, when dealing with moving masses of water, the garden architects of the *sei-cento* are to be found quite in their element and show their genius and great versatility.

The ilex trees of the *bosco* come down to within a few feet of the verge of the terrace, and the broad face is clipped so as to form a deep overhanging cliff of greenery. Immediately beneath the shadow of this, a cypress hedge forms the parapet of the terrace, and this is cut into a succession of arches or great niches containing busts; the top also follows the curve of the arch, and has quaint little finials between each arch. Though time has taken away much of the stiffness from these hedges, they must always have been pleasant to look upon; a more charming finish than that which they give to the terrace to-day, viewed from whatever point you may choose, cannot well be imagined. Where the water enters the cascade, graceful figures recline, intended to represent the cities of Lucca and Florence, which have for the nonce laid aside their ancient animosities, to preside over the water display of which they are the centre. Beyond, in the centre of a circle of cypresses that dominates the summit, stands a huge statue of Fame, balanced upon one foot,

who blows through her long trumpet a jet of water that rises high in air and falls into a pool below. About the arrangement of the *cascatelle* there is much that is quaint and fanciful; water spurts and splashes in every direction, more especially in the vicinity of the *peschiera* or upper pool, though of late years the *giuochi d'acque* have been somewhat curtailed. Perched about the rocks in the lowermost basin are certain "obscene birds" that straddle in aggressive fashion and spout jets of water from their uncouth bills. These weird birds, and the baboons a few yards away, could not of course be permitted in modern gardens. So seriously do we treat them to-day that anything a little playful or foolish can find no place in them. Advantage was taken of the flow of limpid water to build in close proximity to the statue of Fame a delightful little suite of bath- and dressing-rooms. These still retain their eighteenth-century decoration in pale colours and gold, with garlands and scrollwork and charming *putti*.

The dragon gateway through which you pass from here to the grove is very picturesque, the late *baroque* gate-piers with their fanciful twists and scrolls, and winged dragons crouching above, contrasting vividly with the sombre greens of the ilex trees beyond. Within the grove itself the leaf-strewn alleys and the dark gnarled trunks of the ilex, with their patches of deep-green moss, produce an effect of the densest shade conceivable and exceedingly grateful on a warm summer's day. Passing through this wood a covered bridge is reached that spans a little ravine, above which on the steep terraced bank lies the palace.

Immediately beyond the bridge, the path turns sharply to the left overlooking a long terrace of irregular shape, upon which has been constructed a labyrinth; not on an extensive scale, but so ingeniously planned, that, were it not for the meagreness of the hedges, you might experience a little difficulty in finding your way to the central cabinet of verdure and its pleasant group of shady trees.

The labyrinth or maze, which was such a favourite device with the northern nations, does not seem as a rule to have been included in the scheme of the earlier Italian gardens, possibly because it has so little pictorial value. Those referred to by the older writers as existing in the Roman gardens were in all probability merely a section of the garden



which contained a somewhat complex arrangement of box, or, a *bosco* laid out with intricate alleys and *cabinets*, after the fashion so common later in France and England. There is no doubt that this was the case in some gardens. North of Florence, however, especially in villas of later date, labyrinths are not uncommon, and good examples are still to be seen both at Stra and Castellazzo. From the maze a long staircase, broken only by an occasional landing-place, leads up to the palace, close beneath the walls of which is a little *giardino segreto* enclosed by a balustrade and decorated with busts. Across one end of this is a well-preserved aviary, so placed as to be readily accessible from the house.

Returning once more to the second terrace, you find a charming little open-air theatre, which is set back in a recess in the *bosco* and is entirely overshadowed by trees. The stage, which is turfed over, is raised about two feet above the terrace, and is encircled by box-trees clipped in quaint shapes which form the wings. Statues are set on either side, and a wall fountain forms a pleasant background. The front of the stage is masked by a box-hedge, and a rounded boss in the centre covers the prompter's seat. A similar theatre exists at a villa a few miles from Genoa, and another on a somewhat larger scale near to Siena.



George F. Elgion. 1899

VILLAS OF NORTHERN ITALY



VILLA CAVAGNARO

ON a steep hill-side, high above the little town of Rapallo, stands the Villa Cavagnaro, betraying itself at a distance by a line of dark cypress trees and some suggestions of architectural interest. It is on a modest scale, and, as is so often the case with the lesser villas, is quite surrounded by its own *podere*, or farm, in which it is almost lost; the olives, vines, and orchard trees closing it in on every side, seem almost to dispute its right to exist.

The *casino*, of quite moderate dimensions, is a dwelling-place much to be desired, away from the rush and dust and hurry of life. No carriage road comes near it, and the infrequent visitor must needs mount its terraces on foot. A more delightful place in which to spend the *villegiatura* it would be difficult to imagine, for here, even on the warmest day, a delicious breeze comes up from the sea, or down from the mountains.

To reach the entrance gate of the villa, it is necessary to climb by one of those most uncomfortable of pathways, steep, and paved with the roughest of cobble-stones. These same pathways are a characteristic feature of the Riviera di Levante. At length an iron gate, with high stone piers surmounted by urns, comes into view, perched at the top of wide steep steps, and standing in the cool green shadow of some tall trees. From the gateway a broad steep path leads upwards, between the terraces of the *podere*, until it reaches a horse-shoe stairway, with wall fountain below and seats, placed in the shade, above.

From here the path continues to ascend, bordered on either hand

by a low wall. At intervals are stone piers surmounted by marble urns for aloes and other sun-loving plants. Above the wall is an overhanging hedge of sturdy box, cut into rounded tufts or bosses along its top, and at its foot are planted deep crimson and the common pink China rose. Towards the close of the writer's visit, these were in their first full blossoming, and, arranged as they were against a harmonious background of grey stone, they made a picture not easily to be forgotten.

Separated from the ascent by the box hedge is a long green slope, dotted with beds of flowering shrubs. This is entered from the lower end by steps quaintly arranged on a hexagonal plan. The care taken in planning this entrance, with its ante-room or arbour of box, suggests that once these long strips of garden ground were more elaborately laid out, possibly with small beds, bordered with box, and in geometrical pattern not necessarily too intricate. Something of this kind would have had a good effect and would have added to the interest of the garden when seen from the *belvedere* above.

Beyond these garden plots the ground rises so abruptly that a stairway on a more ambitious scale became almost a necessity. Accordingly, we find some six or eight flights of stairs, one above the other, zig-zagging up the steep ascent, the stairs passing right and left alternately, and so making a symmetrical elevation.

At the principal landing there is a great niche, with pilasters and cornice, in which stands a heroic statue of Diana. Seen from a little distance, this statue has the unfortunate defect of all these overgrown statues, which dwarf everything else in their immediate neighbourhood.

This stairway bears some slight resemblance to the one, on a more grandiose scale, at the old Sommariva Villa near Cadenabbia, but this is built entirely of brick, even to the steps themselves. A surface of *stucco* has been added, and the whole is tinted a pale yellow, though not much of this surface is now visible. Festoons of Banksia roses, yellow and white, hang from cornice and balustrade, even invading the sanctuary of Diana herself. To right and left, bushes of oleander hang over from the flanking terraces ; not miserable



bushes these, but great trees twenty feet high or more, which have stems some eight inches in diameter. In April they are still in their sober spring livery, a delicate grey-green. By-and-by a stray pink flower will appear, and then, by insensible degrees, the whole tree will be flooded with the sweet pink bloom, until at length all green will be hidden from view.

At the head of the great stair we find ourselves in a small square garden, a kind of forecourt. Immediately opposite, a last broad flight of curving steps leads to the topmost level and to the *casino*. To right and left are gateways, giving access to the gardens. A long stone seat forms part of the terrace wall, and on every side, wall and balustrade, gate-pier and iron fence, are swathed with greenery and rambling roses. The architectural features are almost hidden from view, though, here and there, a marble urn, or picturesque but nondescript finial, manages to assert itself.

It is on the outer wall of this court that the wistaria in the picture disports itself. It throws out long branches and rambling tendrils in all directions; some away on to the side fences and over the gateways; others away among the branches of the neighbouring trees. Everywhere one meets its all-embracing arms, twisting and clinging in an insinuating fashion to all that comes within their reach. In the full tide of its blossoming can anything be more exquisite! How beautiful is the delicate pale lilac of its long pendent flowers! Well may the Japanese place it among the elect in their paradise of flowers.

Entering by the iron gate to the left of the house, we reach the hanging garden. High walls shelter this from the mountain wind, the *tramontana*. On the walls are trained tall lemon-trees. Happily these trees are recognised throughout Italy as being ornamental as well as useful, and are not banished to the kitchen garden. A low, long hedge of Arbor Vitæ towards the south allows a view of coast and sea. Towards the east the high wall is broken through, a double curve letting it down pleasantly to a little wrought-iron gate, from which steps lead to the terrace below. It is an ideal "lay out" for a small garden. Almost square in plan, it has straight walks around and across it, meeting in the middle at a simple fountain, with low moulded marble

kerb all weather-stained. Unfortunately it has lost its central figure, but it must once have had just such an one as the playful boy in the picture. He would possibly be in the act of blowing water through a shell, or producing it in some other fashion known only to *amorini* and water-nymphs. Set about the fountain, against the curve of the box hedge, are marble benches on bracketed feet, which possibly belonged to some earlier garden.

In the middle of each of the four beds stands a magnolia. This appears to be some variety of the more common kind, for it has smaller leaves and a pleasanter colour and outline. Around and under them, and flowering all the better for the partial shade, grew big bushes of tea roses in their lovely pale tints of cream, apricot, and pink; Viscountess Folkestone, Marie van Houtte, Souvenir d'un Ami, Madame Cochet, and sturdy bushes of the hardy Bourbon, Souvenir de Malmaison.

There is nothing formally correct about this little garden; the straight paths and box-edges give just the right degree of firm outline that is wanted in a place cultivated by man. The strong wild growth of flowering plants and big bush roses, left to follow their own sweet will, breaks the harder lines without hiding them.

Beyond the house, and beyond the forecourt, is a similar but rather longer garden. Here are both beds and borders of roses and "*Riviera May*," *fiori di neve* as the Italians call it, and all among them violets and lily of the valley, and later on snapdragons and sweet-william, valerian and toad-flax, with many another old-fashioned flower. Here and there grow orange- and lemon-trees, sweet-bay, and oleander. At a corner of the higher terrace a Maréchal Niel and Gloire de Dijon mingle their blooms around a marble urn.

At the further end, half hidden among the trees, a garden-house overhangs the terrace-wall, and high above it rise three tall cypress trees. Nearer the house, beneath the wide-spreading branches of a great magnolia, a little square fountain, with its sleepy gold-fish, is made the excuse for more stone seats.

In the absence of the kindly proprietor, I shared the garden with Brin, a great Russian hound, with a coat not unlike the woolly lamb of our childhood. At first he was a little doubtful as to the stranger within his

gates, who sat all the day long monopolising his garden. But when he had been properly introduced, he accepted me as a matter of course, ceased to growl when I appeared, and even received me with a certain degree of cordiality. I think he came to look upon me as a slight break in the monotony of his day. We usually arranged to lunch together, and I found him a most useful receptacle for any superfluous provision. We had many tastes and distastes in common ; we both disliked flies of the persistent and buzzing order, and lean lizard-eating cats—especially if they put in an appearance at meal times. On these occasions their presence did not seem to him either necessary or desirable, and no time was wasted in making his wishes known.

His favourite occupation was to lie out on the warm pavement at the top of the great stair, whence he had an uninterrupted view of the little bay with its fishing-boats. There, too, he could keep an eye on the entrance-gate far below, to which young imps of boys would come, and from which safe vantage-ground they could jeer at him.

During my visit the gardener was away “doing his soldiering.” Luigi, a handsome lad who worked on the *podere*, could only spare an hour early and late to do the absolutely necessary watering, and had no time to devote to overmuch weeding or “tidying-up.” For this mercy I was duly grateful, as the garden was left pretty much to take care of itself. For a garden which has been well planted in the first instance a little wholesome neglect is good. A few things may get out of hand and weeds become a trifle rampant ; but how many things are better for being just left alone !

VILLA IMPERIALI

BUILT on the slopes of a semicircular range of lofty hills, Genoa owes much to the beauty of her position and to the rich vegetation in the midst of which she is placed.

Although, at the commencement of the Renaissance, the city produced no artist of the first rank, it was not long ere she employed several of the best artists of the day, among whom may be mentioned Fra Giovanni Angelo Montorsoli, Giacomo della Porta, Giambologna, Galeazzo Alessi, Giovanni Battista Castello, and Perino del Vaga.

After the siege of Rome in the year 1527, Perino del Vaga, a favourite pupil of Raphael, in order to escape the miseries which followed the sack of the city, fled to Genoa, where he was well received by Prince Andrea Doria, who was at that time engaged in enlarging and beautifying the palace which had been presented to him in recognition of his great services to the State. Here Perino not only decorated the principal rooms of the palace and the garden pavilion, but superintended the painting of the garden façade with frescoes "*qui représente des jeux d'enfants.*" Unhappily the paintings on this façade have entirely disappeared, but the remains of similar decoration on other Genoese palaces carried out by his pupils give some conception of their beauty.

As del Vaga appears to have been consulted on all matters of taste by his patron, it is more than probable that the garden plan, which dates from about the year 1530, is also his. He would naturally be familiar with the gardens recently laid out in the neighbourhood of Rome; notably those of the Vatican and the Villa Madama, both of which are said to have been designed, in part at least, by Raphael himself.



The Palazzo Doria was enlarged and remodelled by Fra Giovanni Angelo Montorsoli. It is set back but a short distance from the sea shore, and is raised upon a narrow terrace, with the *parterre* lying on the level space beneath. A simple but graceful *loggia*, or open gallery, stretches the whole length of the garden façade, and was evidently designed to receive decoration in colour. The flat roof of this *loggia* forms a balcony or terrace, beyond which project two colonnades dividing the terrace into three courts or gardens. Very charming fountains of marble occupy the two outer divisions. In the court, which was formerly the orange garden, is a singularly graceful fountain of marble which shows unmistakably the hand of Montorsoli himself. It stands upon a square platform raised above the garden, and is approached from each side by steps; at the four corners circular balconies project, and balustrades surround these as well as the fountain basin. Above the balustrade appears the central group, a triton riding upon a dolphin from whose jaws a stream of water issues.

In reference to this group Keysler, writing about the year 1730, says: "On the left of the entrance into the gardens, in a fountain, is to be seen the image of a monster, in its fore part resembling a satyr, with two little horns, but in its hind part it has a double fish's tail erect, and is said to have been taken alive."

The marble balustrade that guards the verge of this terrace is interrupted opposite the principal portal, where a gentle slope, paved with pebble-mosaic, leads right and left to the *parterre*. Of the original arrangement little now remains, and the *parterre* of clipped box has been replaced by an aimless medley of trees and shrubs, quite out of character with the delightful architectural setting. The principal feature is still Taddeo Carlone's Fountain of Neptune, erected about the year 1600; it is on a grand scale, the outer basin measuring about fifty feet by thirty-five, but does not compare favourably with the earlier and less ornate fountain in the old orange garden. Raised above it is a second basin, within which is the car of Neptune, drawn by sea-horses and accompanied by numerous baby tritons: a cold and hard piece of work, the white marble of which it is composed emphasising the feebleness of the design. Above the *parterre* along the sea-front is a marble-paved

terrace, surrounded by balustrades, beneath which was an extensive colonnaded hall open on three sides, and approached either from the garden or the shore by stairways. This, which must have been a most delightful adjunct to the garden, has unfortunately been enclosed and converted into merchants' offices.

A feature of this garden in Evelyn's time was an aviary on an unusually grand scale, which appears to have still existed in the year 1780, as it figures in a print of that date. Evelyn writes : " One of the greatest (gardens) here . . . is that of the Prince d'Orias, which reaches from the sea to the sum'it of the mountaines. The house is most magnificently built without, nor less gloriously furnish'd within, having whole tables and bedsteads of massy silver, many of them sett with achates, onyxes, cornelians, lazulis, pearls, turquizes, and other precious stones. The pictures and statues are innumerable. To this Palace belong three gardens, the first whereof is beautified with a terrace, supported by pillars of marble : there is a fontaine of eagles, and one of Neptune with other Sea-gods, all of the purest white marble ; they stand in a most ample basine of the same stone. At the side of this garden is such an aviary as S^r Fra. Bacon describes in his *Sermones fidelium*, or Essays, wherein grow trees of more than two foote diameter, besides cypresse, myrtils, lentiscs, and other rare shrubs, which serve to nestle and perch all sorts of birds, who have ayre and place enough under their ayrie canopy, supported with huge iron worke, stupendious for its fabrick and the charge. The other two gardens are full of orange-trees, citrons, and pomegranads, fontaines, grotts, and statues ; one of the latter is a Colossal Jupiter. . . . The reservoir of water here is a most admirable piece of art ; and so is the grotto over against it."

The balustraded reservoir and its accompanying grotto still existed as recently as 1905, though the former was dry and in use as a bowling alley, but of the fountains and statues on these higher terraces there has been no sign for many a long year. This part of the gardens was formerly connected with the *piano nobile* of the palace by a bridge over the road which passes between them. High up on the verge of the second terrace are two delightful garden-houses commanding a view of



George S. Elgood. 1879

the bay, and beyond these is the colossal statue of Jupiter, which is backed by the *bosco* and forms such a conspicuous feature in the landscape. A new road, in course of construction across these terraces (1905), threatens shortly to sweep away the last vestiges of interest.

The Renaissance villas in the neighbourhood of Genoa frequently occupy long, and comparatively narrow, strips of steeply sloping ground. The palace or *casino* is often placed at or near the foot of the hill with a smaller garden or forecourt in front, and the principal garden on the hill-side at the rear, the wilder portion or *bosco* being reserved for the summit.

For many miles east and west of Genoa the coast is sprinkled with villas of the merchant Princes, but many of the more sumptuous were to be found in the suburbs of Albaro and Sampierdarena. The latter was the favourite resort of the wealthy down to the end of the eighteenth century, and the broad level shore hereabouts was the fashionable evening promenade. Its popularity seems even then to have been on the wane, for we are told that many of the villas were neglected or only occupied occasionally. This neglect, followed by the extension westward of the busy manufacturing element, has quite changed the character of the place. Stately palaces have been degraded into warehouses or factories, and their delightful gardens have fallen into decay, or been built over, or reabsorbed into the surrounding vineyards. Albaro, on the other hand, has been more fortunate, and, thanks in large measure to its elevated situation, still retains much of its suburban character.

About the year 1550 Galeazzo Alessi "to his great honour was invited to enter the service of the Genoese republic." His first work was to extend and fortify the port, but shortly afterwards we find him engaged on work possibly more to his taste, for he began to lay out the Strada Nuova, that celebrated street of palaces. From this time onwards he was busily employed in the erection of palaces and country houses for the nobility, and he is credited with the Villas Pallavicini delle Peschiere, Sauli, Serra, Spinola, Giustiniani, and Grimaldi, besides minor adornments for existing gardens. Soprani writes: "We have also two works by this architect, mentioned by Vasari; namely the fountain of

Capitano Lercari and the *peschiere* of Signor Adamo Centurione ; both distinguished, the one by its excellent decorations in mosaic ; the other for the *isoletta* covered with capricious *grottesche*, upon which the imprudent, after a short turn in a boat, allow themselves to be landed ; and there they are abandoned to the power of the waters by those who wish to make a pretty jest ; while the water, when the taps are opened, coming through subterranean channels, springs up by many jets, and sprinkles those who are left in the *isoletta*, who endeavour in vain to find shelter." Soprani further states that Alessi built the "Palace of the Signori Imperiali" with "the adjacent *peschiere* and the surrounding gardens which form a combination of *rare delizie*."

The Villa Imperiali is one of that large class of Genoese Villas in which the *casino* lies near the foot of a steep hill, with the gardens stretching upwards in a succession of terraces and terminating in a wild wood. The palace is only separated from the public road by a forecourt, with stables on the one hand and a private garden on the other. The dividing walls were ornamented with niches for statues, enclosed in a rococo framework of pilasters and pediments, pierced gables and finials, indescribably quaint and picturesque. Unhappily the Municipality, to whom this property now belongs, and who make use of the palace for schools, recently made a clean sweep of this really charming and unique piece of work ; their only excuse being that it was not in character with a smug new school which they were building in the stucco Lombard style.

At the rear of the palace, the first section of the garden, doubtless the old *parterre*, follows the natural lie of the ground and slopes gently up to the lofty retaining wall of the first terrace. This *parterre*, laid out with rough grass and palm trees, is not of special interest ; tall hedges of oleander and good masses of white or purple iris form its most attractive features.

In the middle of the terrace-wall is the fine fountain shown in the accompanying picture. This consists of three niches placed between telamones. The central niche has the greatest depth, and its type is that of the grotto fountain ; the other two carry statues. Among the lemon-trees that line the wall hang festoons of roses, pale yellows and

pinks predominating, which seem to overflow into the narrow box-bordered bed beneath. On the other side, the path is flanked by orange-trees, each in its own small bed and surrounded by pansies and wall-flower, ixia and snapdragon, or Bocchi di Leone as the gardener calls it.

The fountain is a favourite play-place for the youngsters, who come at all hours to sail their paper boats and dabble in the clear water, or make feeble attempts to catch the basking gold-fish, who are more wide awake than they seem. The bright-eyed darting lizards, on the other hand, fall an easy prey to the idle lads, who angle for them with loops of grass.

The terrace above is largely given up to shrubby trees and some beds of poppies, larkspurs, and other annuals, its most interesting feature being certain delicately proportioned fountain *tazze* raised upon tall, fluted pedestals. M. P. Gautier, who published a book early in the nineteenth century on Genoese villas, placed these at the corners of a great fountain pool, which he represents as occupying about one-third of the terrace. A delightful feature this, if it ever existed ; for reflected in its surface would be the higher terrace with its balustraded stairways and statues, the dark masses of trees above, and the yet darker arches of the grotto beneath. If Gautier were always correct in his details, we might accept his pool without demur ; unfortunately, like Percier and Fontaine, he occasionally allows his imagination to run away with him. In the case of this pool, the lie of the ground renders his representation highly improbable, though not absolutely impossible.

Above the grotto, stairs ascend to the higher terrace, where once more we find ourselves at the foot of a gentle slope. From the pleasant resting-place provided at this point, the central path, which leads upwards, is lined with statues and most fantastic fountains, backed by an unkempt hedge of pittosporum, with here and there a bush of monthly rose.

These fountains are of such an unusual type that they deserve more than a passing word. At the rear of a circular basin stands a pedestal, the stiffness of which is taken away by certain roll ornaments. Above this is an *amorino* riding a strange water-beast—"loves of monsters," as the old ladies used to term their fashionable china grotesques. From the

mouths of these beasts water used to spurt into the basin below ; but the waterworks have been allowed to go very much to ruin, and only a tithe of the fountains now play ; many of them have been filled up with earth and planted with trailing geraniums and other bright flowers.

Beyond the incline, the one level space in the villa is occupied by a rectangular reservoir, about sixty paces by forty, which is enclosed by a low wall overhung with virginian creeper, brambles, and Banksia rose, and further encircled by tall poplars. Arranged at each corner are *cabinets de verdure*, entered by bizarre archways and provided with benches and pedestals for statues ; left open towards the south, they commanded a view of the open sea and the coast-line stretching away into the grey distance beyond Savona.

A grotto, about which stairways wind to a *belvedere* above, marks the division between the more formal garden and the *bosco*. Within this wilder wood you meet at every turn beasts of ferocious aspect, but fortunately for your peace of mind they are firmly rooted to the rocks from which they have been carved.

Within an open glade beyond the wood, a pavilion, shadowed by ancient cypresses, stands at the margin of the great tank that feeds the fountains on the lower levels. All around are orchards and vineyards, backed by the lower spurs of the Alpes Maritimes ; so far into the country has the garden penetrated that all sign of the busy city and its noisy streets is left far behind.

The grotto near the edge of the *bosco* is entered by an archway between statues of two garden deities. Within is a vaulted chamber with a spacious oval basin encircled by a narrow pathway. Walls and vaulting are decorated in rude mosaic, with scroll-work, sea-monsters, and attenuated terminal figures. In many of its details this grotto answers to Vasari's description of a bath built by Alessi for the Villa Grimaldi : " He has, indeed, constructed numerous fine fountains for many persons, but more beautiful than all else is the bath which has been formed after his design in the villa of the Signor Battista Grimaldi at Bisagno. This, which is of a round form, has a basin in the centre within which eight or ten persons can bathe commodiously. Warm water is poured into the basin from four heads of marine monsters, while

the cold water is supplied by as many frogs which are placed above the heads of these monsters. Around the basin, into which there is a commodious descent by circular steps, there is a space in which two persons can walk together conveniently. The wall is divided into eight compartments, in four of which are large niches, each of them having a circular basin, but slightly raised from the ground and half within the niche, while the other half projects beyond it ; the basin, which is large enough for a man to bathe therein, receives cold and hot water from the horns of a great mask, which takes the same in again at its mouth. In one of the other four compartments is the door, the remaining three divisions having windows and seats in them. These eight compartments are separated by terminal figures which support the cornice whereon the circular vaulting of the whole fabric reposes."

Keysler writes of the Villa Imperiali about the year 1730 : "The eye is charmed with a successive variety of the most elegant decorations, such as beautiful hedges, espaliers, walks, and covered alleys of cypresses, box, rosemary, vines, lemon, orange, and citron trees ; as also fine statues, canals, fountains, grottoes, an aviary, a menagerie, &c."

Perhaps the day may come when the municipality will awake to the possibilities of this still beautiful garden, and put back some at least of its older features. A few hedges of rosemary, myrtle, or box, would cost little enough, and they are badly wanted, if only as a shelter from the sea breezes. Furthermore, a lack of continuity in the architectural scheme is caused by their absence. At the present day there is a tendency to allow the villa to degenerate into a third-rate landscape garden, and the firm outline of the older garden is gradually being replaced by the feeble prettiness of acacia, "fir-tree," and palm.

It is not possible to enlarge here on the beauty of the courtyards and small gardens within the city ; what was written respecting them by James Edward Smith about the year 1786 is to a great extent true at the present time : "Many of the noble Genoese have a sort of hanging gardens upon the bastions of the town, which, although often confined in space, have a peculiarly romantic and singular effect. Bowers of passion-flower, treillages of vines, terraces, and grass-plats, decorated with all sorts of sweet-smelling flowers, offer themselves unexpectedly one after

another without end ; and every step, in general, presents a prospect of the bay and surrounding country, equally rich, varied and extensive. The great advantage of these gardens is their situation within the walls, which makes them accessible at all times ; whereas the town-gates being shut about eight or nine o'clock, to return from a country villa, after those hours, is impracticable. . . . To these villettas, as they are called, their owners retire in the cool of the evening."



VILLA ARSON

CEDED to France by the treaty of 1860, Nice still retains much of its Italian character, and hidden away in odd nooks and corners an occasional villa may yet be discovered built on the good old lines. Among these the Villa Arson stands pre-eminent, not merely for its most enviable situation, but also as practically the one villa on this side of the frontier that still retains much of its well-designed gardens.

It lies some little distance back from Nice, on a steep knoll which it shares with the village and Monastery of S. Barthélémy. Far away from the dust, and heat, and glare of the great coast road, it is protected from the keen north winds by an amphitheatre of hills, the first lofty spurs of those grand Alpes Maritimes that lie hidden from view beyond. Olive groves clothe the steep slopes around about it, and in the green valley, which runs far into the surrounding hills, are little farms, each with its group of peach and pear, almond and plum, damson and cherry, their fragile blossom lighting up the silvery grey olives; and here and there in sheltered nooks is a little grove of lemons.

As compared with the average Italian Villas the grounds are not extensive, though large enough for all reasonable requirements. The *casino* occupies the crest of the hill, the gardens inclining towards the south in a succession of half a score terraces, some broad, others a few yards wide only. The principal entrance is towards the north, and on that side there would possibly have been something of the nature of a *bosco*, shielding it from the cold northerly winds; of this wood only a fringe remains, surrounding a tennis court and a lawn of rough grass. The approach was formerly by an avenue of ancient cypresses, that

skirts one side of the garden and adds so much to its picturesqueness ; but a more convenient road has of late years been brought along the flank of the hill, and so up through the olive-yards.

The older *casino*, built possibly some two hundred years ago, belongs to that charming and simple type which is to be met with anywhere between Cannes and Spezia ; it is a class of house which continued to be built on this coast until about fifty years ago, when its place was usurped by the pretentious suburban villa of the Parisian architect. With little architectural pretension, it depends for its effect solely upon its good proportions and broad masses. A deep cornice, below the parapet, shades the upper windows ; some scrolls and curves break the sky-line above, with urns or finials at the corners ; but beyond that there is nothing to break the flat surface.

These comparatively plain buildings were probably intended to be frescoed in patterns more or less elaborate, as is still frequently done beyond the Italian frontier. In fact, till quite recently, this *casino* was decorated with plain panels, painted in two shades of that beautiful warm red which was once so common around Genoa and Savona, and with other simple embellishments about the doors and windows.

Into the architectural features scattered about the garden, a pleasant scheme of colour, cream white with red and ochre, was also carried, and this had been toned into exquisite harmony with its surroundings by exposure to sun and rain.

The outlook from the upper windows of the house is most delightful. The garden, with its quaint mingling of flowers and statues, lies before you, flanked on either hand by fine groups of stone pine and cypress. Beyond, often enveloped in a kindly mist, is the town of Nice with its Château (the ancient Arx) standing out against the sea as a prominent feature in the landscape ; while, to right and left, running down to the sea, in which they lose themselves, are those spurs of the Alps which give such character and variety to this lovely coast.

The terrace adjoining the house is some seventy paces by twenty-five, and is laid out with four plots placed end to end. These are bright with flowers ; pansies of all shades, great scarlet and white poppies with their lovely grey foliage, iris purple and pale blue, pelargoniums,



ageratums, white and yellow daisies, and sweet-smelling gilly-flowers, pinks and roses. About the beds, planted on no set principle, are orange-trees, lilac and oleander bushes. The principal paths are edged with low walls interrupted at frequent intervals by pedestals with vases.

At one end of the terrace, overhanging the valley, is a *pergola* covered with vines and white and pink cluster roses; at the other is a simple orangery, and, uniting the two along the terrace front, runs a balustrade with ball finials, which is almost lost amidst a confused tangle of wistaria and roses, virginian creeper and ivy, the architectural features peeping through only here and there.

A peculiarity of this garden is, that it does not centre with the casino but with a fountain, set against the low wing that connects the older casino with the more modern part of the house. Perhaps the most delightful feature of the villa is this Fountain of Venus. Within a charming framework of rococo ornament is a niche in which stands a reproduction in terra-cotta of the Venus di Medici. The framework is wrought partly in stucco painted a pale blue, and partly in a mosaic of various stones and sea-shells. The materials are simple enough, yet in clever hands what a work of art is the result, and what an exquisite harmony of colour is produced by the delicate turquoise blue, the pearly grey of the shell-work, and the warm, faded pink of the adjacent wall.

To a narrow slip of terrace below graceful trefoil stairways lead, guarded by tall gate piers above and by rude garden deities below, which superior people consider in shocking taste. A grotto occupies the centre of the terrace, with a fountain and seats within, and niches and fountains without, decorated with mosaic and shell-work *groteschi* similar to that used in the Fountain of Venus and elsewhere in the gardens. Its open roof was doubtless once covered with a trellis for roses or vines. To-day the architecture bids fair to disappear entirely beneath the heavy mantle of coarse ivy, which might with advantage be replaced by some climbing rose or lighter creeper that would veil without hiding the architectural detail.

Shady walks are formed at each end of the terrace by *berceaux* of Banksian rose, in April covered with masses of exquisite bloom, pale saffron or pearly white, which rambles away over the statues and

balustrades and up into the cypress- and olive-trees, dropping garlands as it climbs.

For a description of the gardens as they were a quarter of a century since, I cannot do better than quote the words of the late Dean Hole,* who about the year 1880 spent some months at the Villa Arson, and who, knowing my predilection for the older type of garden, strongly recommended it to my notice. "Passing under the archway, which is covered with the Banksian rose, and leaving on the left the curious 'Fountain Kiosk' composed of stone, shells, glass, statues, and tanks (note especially the swans done in cockle shells, within, and the beautiful muhlenbeckia on the southern front, without), and erected by the *Société des Ouvriers de Nice* in honour of Commander Arson de St. Joseph, one of the former owners of the villa, and descending the first of the terraces, of which there are seven, you walk through a little avenue of magnolias, the tallest about thirty feet in height, covered with their large lustrous leaves and cone-like seed vessels, showing here and there the bright vermilion seeds. Then going on from platform to platform—

D'étage en étage, on allait de surprise en surprise—

you have around you a most charming collection of trees and shrubs and flowers : eucalyptus and carouba, cedar, cypress and pine ; the pepper tree, cratægus, acacia, camellia, escallonia, veronica, kennedya, plumbago, teucrium fruticosum (the pale blue salvia, with its white woolly leaf) ; . . . an abundance of roses, principally Chinas, Teas, and Bourbons, such as Cramoisie supérieure, fabvier, gloire de rosmene, safrano, gloire de Dijon, acidalie, and Bourbon queen ; phloxes, petunias, carnations, violets, mignonette, pansies ; the aloe, still wearing its scarlet glory ; hedges of the spiræa or Italian May, at rest, and of coronilla and red geranium intermixed, and here and there gay with flowers.

"The glorious view opens out before you as you go down the garden, until, reaching the central terrace, you look over the orange-trees, with red roses almost touching their golden fruit, upon the monastery and

* "Nice and her Neighbours." (S. Low & Co., 1881.)



S. Elgar 1899

church of St. Barthélémy below, upon the city of Nice, and, beyond the city, the blue waters of the Mediterranean sea."

Since this was written, many changes have taken place in the old garden, and not for the better, especially during the last few years. The Fountain of Venus has been daubed over with common blue, and white-wash has been applied with lavish hands to all the garden ornaments; while good trees and plants have been grubbed up to make way for more palms and "fir-trees." A few more years and it will have sunk to a level with all the other hotel gardens on the Riviera, and, as the landlord says, "the visitors will like it much better."

The granddaughter of the Commendatore, whom the writer met on his last visit to the Villa Arson, writes: "The Villa was bought by my grandfather, Commendatore Pierre Joseph Arson de St. Joseph, and is one of the oldest in Nice. The east building was added by my father in 1863 with the intention of letting it to the King of Bavaria. He used to come in the evenings of April and May to visit my mother with friends, she receiving on the garden terraces by moonlight. I remember it all so well as a child. I used to sit in a tree with my brother René and watch the gay company. But just as the house was finished Maximilian died, and the year after my father died also. The King and Queen of Savoy, Carlo Felice and Maria Cristina visited my grandparents. Great night fêtes were given, and we have the jewels they left to my grandfather, consisting of a gold snuff-box with the Queen's initials in diamonds and a necklace of amethysts and sapphires. Garibaldi came there in 1855, assisting at my sister's baptism in the chapel, to whom he left the flag he had carried in the American War. He came as President of the 'Société de Secours mutuel,' and the Society swore loyalty to my tiny sister. Many of great name, princes, poets, painters, sculptors, musicians, statesmen, have visited the dear old house. I remember well Alphonse Karr, the French writer and critic, a great friend of my father. He was the first in Nice to cultivate his flowers for sale, the pioneer of the present floral trade of the Riviera. Lord Bulwer Lytton wrote one of his best novels in the garden under the big cypress tree. My grandfather was a Freemason and wished to be buried in the garden, but his remains are now in sacred ground."

VILLA CICOGNA

THROUGHOUT Northern Italy, from Piedmont to Venetia, notwithstanding the comparative flatness of so much of the country, villas are to be found wherever a suitable site presents itself. On the low grounds the country-house is more frequently met with than the *maison de plaisance*, and it is not until we get among the foot-hills or the lakes that the latter preponderates.

In the immediate neighbourhood of the larger cities, especially of Milan, Turin, Venice, the pure pleasure-house naturally is found in greater numbers, but in recent years there has been a tendency to abandon these in favour of the villas that line the shores of the great lakes. This is the more to be regretted, for many of them were of exceptional interest, as may be seen by reference to Marc-Antonio Dal R 's engravings of Castellazzo, with their accompanying description in verse, or his better-known "Ville di Delizia." The same may be said of the villas so graphically shown in the "Novum Theatrum Pedemontii et Sabaudia ." Among these, could anything excel in ostentatious magnificence the Villas Il Valentino, della Regina, or Millefleurs, now, alas, shorn of all their wondrous embellishments? At Castellazzo something still remains of the extensive gardens, showing, like many another villa hereabouts, unmistakable signs of French influence.

Another villa near Treviglio, also belonging to the great Visconti family, was until quite recently yet more interesting. This was a moated house, dating from the end of the seventeenth century, the gardens of which were not on a large scale, owing to the somewhat restricted site, but they made up for this by the richness of their



decorations. The rectangular box *parterre* was enclosed by a raised bank or terrace a few yards wide, which overhung the moat. At each corner was an octagonal pavilion, encrusted with mosaic, its high-pitched roof hung with tiny bells which jangled with every puff of wind. Opposite the main paths, curving stairways led upwards to this terrace, and each of these and the adjacent walls were fringed with rococo vases and statues, both singly and in groups. Within and around the *parterre* were fountains, in which tritons and *amorini*, dolphins and sea-monsters, spouted the livelong day. Unhappily some four or five years since the gardens were ruthlessly dismantled, and fountains and statues were sold and carried away piecemeal. Many of these were sent to America, to be set up in so-called Italian gardens. One can only regret that beautiful villas (for this is by no means a solitary example) should be thus despoiled in order to provide "ornaments" for prosaic modern gardens; among their raw new surroundings they can at best but look hopelessly out of place.

Far up one of the many lovely valleys that stretch away northwards from the great Lombard plain into the grey hills lies the Villa Cicogna. To reach it you traverse many miles of rich undulating country, studded with farmsteads, and villas which are often more farm than villa, but still betray their more refined origin by their handsome gateways ornamented with shields and rampant lions, broken pediments, or flower-laden vases. Corn and vine, fruit orchard and meadowland, fill the valley with their luxuriant growth, while terraced *poderi* invade the lower slopes of the surrounding hills.

The villa stands back only a short distance from the highway that passes through the little feudal village, with its pink and white campanile, and runs onwards up the fertile valley. A short incline, overshadowed by trees, leads to the forecourt; the grand portal lying directly in front, with the steward's house and the farm buildings ranged around it. The *casino*, from this aspect, is very like a hundred other plain and unsophisticated buildings of its class, and holds out no promise of special interest either for itself or its garden.

Up the little flight of steps at the side of the house, and through an iron wicket, or dog-gate, you reach an arcaded *loggia*, open to

the north and to the fresh mountain breezes that blow down the valley.

A long and somewhat narrow terrace stretches away from this *loggia*, while close at hand is a fountain-basin, its slender jet giving life and music to the garden. Around this, grateful for the moisture and half-shade, are grouped pots of many-coloured flowers; Paris daisies and fuchsias, carnations, lilies, and azaleas being as usual the favourites. At the farther end of the garden, among beds of roses, is another fountain, or more strictly speaking *peschiera*, in which are innumerable gold-fish. To the left, the terrace-wall is supported, for more than half its length, upon a series of arches, making a cool grotto in which, among fountains and runlets of water, maidenhair fern and other moisture-loving things flourish.

A flight of steps, built within the thickness of the wall, leads to the higher terrace, formerly the *parterre* but now laid out with grass, over which are scattered a few beds of flowers too suggestive of carpet-bedding to be specially interesting. The box-bordering, taken away some years since, of which traces still remain round the walls, might with great benefit to the garden be restored. It is curious what a prejudice gardeners have against box, yet no other edging is one-half so beautiful in itself, or shows up the flowers to greater advantage.

All round this garden, upon the low wall, at frequent intervals, are turned bases for flower-pots. They are of unusual design and peculiar to this villa, taking the form of squat balusters, about sixteen inches high and twelve in width.

A broad walk, from which the *piano nobile* of the *casino* can be entered on the level, runs the whole length of the garden terraces, some hundred and seventy paces long. At one end of this you look down over a balustrade into a sunk garden, with its display of flowers and fountains. The other end terminates beneath an archway in the great ilex hedge, where, from stone benches set within a balustraded balcony, you have a delightful view over a wooded slope to the distant mountains, which, even in June, still retain their snowy caps.

Beside the long walk, the retaining wall of the terrace above is screened by a magnificent laurel hedge. At intervals in this are deep

green caves, with charming little *tazze* supported on tall fluted stems ; the water, falling from the mouths of grotesque masks set in the fronts of the *tazze*, is caught in trefoil basins beneath.

From the rear of the *casino* the hill rises somewhat abruptly, though to a great extent it is left at its natural slope, only one other narrow terrace being excavated from the lower edge, just above the house. To this a wide easy flight of grass-grown steps ascends, opposite the middle of the *casino*, and here, at the top of the first flight, is one of the most notable features of the villa—the fountain at the foot of the cascade. This cascade does not take the usual form of “water steps,” or a series of basins with water falling from one to another, like those in Rome and its vicinity. It is rather in the nature of a water slide, the stream descending a steep channel between long flights of stairs, closely hemmed in by magnificent old cypresses. Reaching the foot, the water overflows into a handsome basin raised on great claw-feet, and having a grotesque head in the centre of its deeply moulded front. Curving stairways are brought down either side of this basin, and raised above them, upon the flanking walls, are recumbent water nymphs, half lost amidst a tangle of wild creeper. The constant splashing of the *cascatella* has covered all around with a mantle of fern and moss and rich purple and orange stain, by which wall and fountain, with the pavement and stairway below, are brought into delightful harmony. Ranged along this same terrace are to be seen the best of the flowers, the extra shade and moisture being specially favourable to them ; even the phlox, a plant not often seen to advantage in Italy, flowers well here. But the terrace is never more beautiful than in springtime, when wistaria is in blossom, for then the retaining walls are hung with garlands of its most lovely bloom, and the water nymphs lie nearly buried beneath billows of that exquisite blue that so well harmonises with warm grey stone and the delicate spring tints.

At the summit of the cascade, the centre of a group of dark cypresses, stands a *gazebo* ; a small square building with arches opening on every side, from which green shady paths radiate. Not far away, on the skirts of the *bosco*, the aqueduct, which supplies the fountains, enters the garden. Advantage was taken of a sudden drop in the ground to

construct a delightful fountain on somewhat similar lines to the one below the cascade. The conduit ends with a shallow *tazza* overhanging an oval basin ; this in turn is raised above a circular pool, thereby giving a succession of falls, very refreshing to the eye. Enclosing this is a wide semicircular hedge with grey stone benches, and the overhanging trees of the *bosco* create a delicious twilight even at midday ; an ideal retreat for a summer's afternoon. From this higher ground, a broad flight of stairs descends to the *belvedere*, pausing on the way at many resting-places. One of these is enclosed by balustrades, and provided with seats and charming fountains, while through a gap cut in the chestnut woods glimpses are caught of lake and distant mountain.

As was the case with so many other villas, the hill-side had to be excavated to provide standing room for the *casino*. Here the excavation was extended sideways, so as to create a little level space for the beautiful sunk garden with its fountains and grotto. The *casino*, built about three sides of a *cortile*, the fourth side being open to the garden, is of two stories, and the ground floor has an open-vaulted arcade of singularly graceful proportions. Above the arches, the walls still retain much of their original fresco decorations, thanks largely to the protection afforded by the deep overhanging eaves. These are unusually pleasing both in conception and colour, perhaps the most delightful portion being the broad frieze, above the arcade, which is painted with various coats of arms and charming *amorini* who play among them.

Nearly one-third of the adjacent garden is taken up with two balustraded *peschiere*, each about thirty feet in length by twenty in breadth. The centrepiece of one of these is a group of *amorini* wrestling with some strange lizard or water-beast, who spouts water high in air ; in the other a curly tailed dragon disports himself. The remainder of the space is divided into two box-bordered plots gay with flowers, and placed in the midst of each are pedestal fountains, of singular beauty, decorated with masks and garlands. The surrounding walls, where not screened by tall evergreen hedges, are adorned with statues of gods and goddesses or busts of Roman Emperors in niches.

In line with the *peschiere* is a grotto or *salle fraîche*, at present used

for garden lumber only, or as winter storage for lemon-trees. Though now damp and uninviting enough, at one time it doubtless formed a most delightful adjunct to the garden ; its walls and roof fantastically decorated with painting and mosaic, while refreshing jets of water played on every side ; the coolness within contrasting most pleasantly with the hot August sun without.

LA BADIA

AT an early date we find the shores of the *Lacus Larius*, or Lake of Como, occupied by the villas of the wealthy Romans, who were not slow to recognise the advantages it offered for their pleasure houses. In the *Georgics*, Virgil refers lightly to both this lake and the *Lago di Garda* (*Benacus*), as though they were too well known to need a longer dissertation.

Pliny makes frequent reference in his letters to his own villas, and those of his friends, situate upon the *Lacus Larius*. At, or near, the town of Como Pliny was born, and though he would naturally feel some partiality for the place of his birth, he yet shows how strongly the beauty of the lake and its surroundings appeal to him, for he constantly refers to it in the warmest terms. Writing to his friend *Caninus Rufus*, he expresses regret that he is debarred from the pleasures of “our favourite *Larius* . . . which I as eagerly long for, as a man in a fever pants for drink to allay his thirst or baths and fountains to assuage his heat.” And again he says : “Tell me what are you doing at *Comum* ? *Comum*, equally the object of our delight ! Tell me some news of that enchanting villa ; of the green gallery, where it is always spring ; of the plane-trees, which spread themselves most diffusively ; of the green enamelled banks of your canal ; of your lake, situated for pleasure and for use ; of your place for exercise, the ground of which is soft and yet solid ; of your bath, open to the sun on every side ;” . . . In a letter to *Voconius Romanus* he gives some account of his own villas on this lake.

“I am pleased,” he writes, “to find by your letter that you have begun to build. I have from thence an excuse for my works of that



kind. For now it may be said, I build with good reason, since I follow your example. Nor are our situations unlike ; you build near the sea, I am at the same distance from the Larian lake. Upon the borders of it I have several seats ; two of which, as they give me the greatest delight, so they employ my greatest attention. One of them is placed upon a rock, and commands the lake ; the other is close to the water ; both in the manner of those at Baia. . . . Each of them has particular beauties, a diversity which renders them to their master still more agreeable. One has a nearer, the other a more distant view of the lake. One, by a gentle curve in the building, forms a single bay ; the other, being built upon a greater height, forms two. Here, you may ride in a long avenue by the side of the lake ; there, you may walk down an extensive and easy terrace.

“ One of these houses is not within reach of the waves ; and they are broken and repulsed by the other. From the former you can discern the people fishing ; from the latter you may angle yourself, and, as if you lay in a fishing-boat, may throw your line out of your bedchamber, and almost from your bed. My reason for making the additions that are wanting in these places is because they are already so beautiful. But why should I give you a reason when, by following your example, my inducement must appear to you ? Adieu.”

It was probably at one of these villas that the ebbing and flowing spring was to be found of which he gives an interesting account in another place. “ A spring rises in a mountain, it runs down through rocks, and is afterwards received into a banqueting-house artificially formed for that purpose. The force of its current is there a little retarded, and falls from thence into the Larian lake. The nature of this spring is surprising. Three times in a day it regularly rises and subsides, in equal degrees of proportion. This is plainly perceivable, and you are at once convinced and delighted. You may lie down by it, and regale yourself with a collation, while the fountain, which is exquisitely cold, supplies you with drink ; in the meantime the spring, in equal and reciprocal periods of time, either ebbs or flows.”

A more detailed description of one of these villas would have been interesting, as they were in all likelihood laid out in quite a different

manner from those he describes elsewhere. It is from this intermittent spring, or one having the same properties, that the Villa Pliniana has received its name. This villa, which lies at no great distance from Como, was built towards the close of the sixteenth century by a certain Conte Anguissola. It is situated in a little bay facing towards the north, and is in consequence one of the coolest on the lake. So steep is the shore at this point that the *casino* literally has its foundations in the lake. It is built about a small *cortile*, the two wings of the house being joined by a most charming open *loggia*. In the centre is a circular fountain basin, with a figure of Neptune supported upon a tall carved and fluted pedestal. At the rear the court backs on to the cliff, where within a grotto is found the intermittent spring, overhung with ferns and mosses.

An ideal open-air room this ; for, looking through the arches of the *loggia*, there is a most delightful view up the long reach of the lake, with the enclosing hills clothed with chestnut and olives, and its shores enlivened by villas and slender *campanili*.

On the opposite shore of the lake is the Villa d'Este, which occupies a more open position. So many vicissitudes has this villa passed through that little is left of the original gardens. It was built by Cardinal Gallio towards the close of the sixteenth century, but probably was enlarged, and the gardens were remodelled, at a much later date, by Conte Odescalchi.

The most interesting portion of the garden, at the present day, is the great screen-wall that terminates the garden, with the cascade seen through a break in it. The former is a very picturesque piece of eighteenth-century work, and would be still more delightful if only it had the advantage of a good foreground of flowers and box-work in place of the present neglected grass and shrubs. A curving stairway leads to the opening in the middle of this screen, and on either side are wide semi-circular recesses. The wall is decorated with pilasters and entablature, enclosing niches, statues, busts, and panels of stucco-work, and terminates above the cornice in segmental pediments and slim obelisks. The whole surface is encrusted with a rude stone mosaic, which, especially at a little distance, gives a very pleasing texture. Within the screen is an oval court, which encloses a large *peschiera* or fountain, with deep niches at



either end, and a double stair ascends from this to the foot of the cascade.

From this point a grand avenue of cypresses leads upwards to a statue of Hercules placed within a grotto. Whether at any time there was a cascade here, in the ordinary sense of the word, is open to question, the water-supply being but limited. At present it is represented by a grassy slope, flanked by stone channels. These are raised upon low walls, built in a long series of steps, to suit the slope of the ground, and down these, in a succession of *cascatelle*, the water flows. Near the summit, beneath the shadow of the tall trees, are placed certain stone couches, reclining upon which an enchanting prospect is enjoyed of sparkling cascade and cypress avenue, with a vista of shimmering lake and distant mountains.

Some few of the villas, scattered along the shores of the lake, display good bits of architectural detail in their entrance-gates and water-stairways. Perhaps the most notable among these is the well-known Villa Carlotta, or, as it was formerly named, Sommariva. The narrow lane that leads from Cadenabbia to Tremezzo passes in front of it, cutting it off from the lake, and gives excuse for a well-designed balustrade with piers and statues. These last are backed by a tall ilex hedge, and wreathed with garlands of roses. Within the grille is a little circular garden, flanked by groves of ilex, and in its centre is a charming fountain with *amorino* and dolphin, and a jet of water that plays among the white water-lilies.

From this an elaborate staircase rises, in half a dozen flights, direct to the *casino*, passing on the way three balustraded terraces, the broadest of which is barely twenty-five feet wide, each being marked by some fountain or grotto. Above and around the stairway, roses and other flowering plants clamber, almost hiding the architectural features from view.

The garden on either side of the *casino* is laid out with lawns and shrubberies, palms, bamboos, and "fir-trees." They are not specially interesting, though in spring, when the azaleas are in bloom, the garden is, for a time, a blaze of colour.

Among the innumerable villas that line the shores of the Lago

Maggiore, few have gardens that are in any degree satisfactory ; they are almost without exception what are called landscape gardens. This is equivalent to saying that a piece of ground, naturally interesting and picturesque, has had all the better trees carefully eliminated, their place being taken by others which are both inappropriate and unpicturesque.

One of the rare exceptions is the garden on the Isola Bella—a garden which has had a quite unreasonable amount of abuse lavished upon it, especially of recent years. No one would dream of comparing it with the best gardens of the *cinque-cento* ; but it possesses features which are so good that one can well afford to overlook the less admirable parts.

The Isola Bella, formerly a bare, rocky island, was converted into a garden, during the first half of the seventeenth century, by Conte Carlo Borromeo and his successor. Terrace rises above terrace to a height of some hundred feet above the surface of the lake ; several of these terraces are carried upon arches, and all are fringed with balustrades, vases, statues, and tall obelisks. The uppermost terrace, about forty-five paces long, covers the great cistern which supplies the various fountains and *giuochi d'acqua*. At one extremity of the island, two octagonal garden pavilions rise from the water's edge, flanked by stairways, and, with the picturesque mingling of statues and flowering plants, make a delightful picture as seen from the lake. Certain features of these gardens are in decidedly poor taste, such as the *rocaille théâtre d'eau*, with its three tiers of grotto niches filled with statues and great shells ; yet this has all the appearance of a much later addition, and bears no relation to the better work found elsewhere in the gardens.

In quite a different style from the Isola Bella is the little monastery garden of La Badia. It lies in an out-of-the-way corner of the lake, high up among the chestnuts and beeches, surrounded by its own orchards and vineyards. The little old monastery, now deserted by the monks, is built round a cloister court, its centre marked by an artless fountain, which throws a sparkling jet of water high in air.

On this steep slope there is little space for gardens ; a narrow terrace or two shaded by vine *pergole*, and a small rectangular plot at one end of

the house, laid out with box borders, constitute the garden. Planted and tended with loving care, the sunny terraces are full of the gayest and sweetest of old-fashioned flowers. Pinks and carnations fringe the terrace walls, snapdragons and foxgloves, sweet-williams and pansies of richest hue, white Madonna lilies and blushing peonies, stocks and gillyflowers, orange day lilies and pale blue hydrangea fill the beds to overflowing. And adding to these their spicy odours come rosemary, thyme and lavender, myrtle and sweet bay.

The most charming feature of the little garden, however, is the arcade of clipped box, with its quaint finials, that closes in the forecourt and gives such a delightful old-world air to the place. What enchanting peeps of distant lake and misty mountain are to be had through the arched openings, and between the wild sprays of pink and white rose, that, not content with concealing from view one of the great bosses, wander away far over arch and *pergola*, only to reappear in the most unexpected manner !

This is, so far as I am aware, the only example of topiary work, on an extensive scale, upon the Italian lakes ; yet, shortly before my visit, some strange being, deficient in both humour and artistic sense, suggested to the proprietor that he should remove this "eyesore" and replace it with a decent iron railing and some shrubs !

From this forecourt descend long and gently sloping steps, that wander hither and thither upon the steep hill-side, always taking the easiest way ; past terrace walls hung with ferns and wild flowers, and pausing awhile beneath vine *pergole* and chestnut copses, before finally reaching the margin of the lake. These pleasant ways were made by people who took life in leisurely fashion, people who had both time and patience to bestow upon the training of the old box-trees that fringe their garden terrace.

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